T1

Crackdown 2

Dan Takes on Crackdown 2 to see if it's all it's "cracked" up to be

Alternative E3 Roundup

E3's so big that a lot of games get overlooked, well, not by us!

+Naughty Bear + Mario Galaxy 2

FIFA Online, Biker Battles, Blacklight: Tango Down, Dr Who, King Arthur, CoD Vs Battlefield, Landit Bandit, SteelSeries Syberia V2, Razer Imperator, Game Horizon 2010, Comps + more!

From The Ed's Head

Well, that was a disappointment.If you read the last issue of Thirteen1 - and I'll assume you did, because you drop everything to read this magazine every month, yeah!? - you'll know I was a 'little' bit excited for the World Cup. More importantly, I was ready to scream my lungs out for all things England. After many years of international football hurt (my whole life as a footy fan, basically), I should have known it would all end in tears. But, just like that much-too-hot girlfriend who keeps cheating on you, I once again put all my trust in my bimbo of a national team because it's allure is too strong to resist...
...shame they handle balls about as well as Jeremy Beadle did during his personal time. (R.I.P)

Luckily, as always, gaming is here to act as a shining light in the darkest of times. I mean, how could I stay down about England getting thoroughly embarrassed by Germany when Crackdown 2 was on the horizon? Besides, EA have just launched footballing MMO FIFA Online for me to right all the wrongs, so as long as I pretend that everything that happens in my head is a reality, this could turn out to be a great summer after all. One where we triumphed in the World Cup, where I'm able to scale giant buildings in a single leap, and where Megan Fox isn't married to some random geezer that's not bloody me!

We've been treated to a surprisingly wonderful bounty of games this summer, proving yet again that 2010 is probably the best year gaming has ever seen. Mario Galaxy 2 has burst onto the scene as a follow up to one of our all-time favourite games; World of WarCraft are launching an almighty expansion called Cataclysm; and even our favourite time travelling doctor, Doctor Who (that's his name, not a question, for any of our foreign readers somehow not in the know), has got in on the act with a few episodic games.

As reliable and tipsy as always, our DrunkenGamer has covered all of these delights in one fellow swoop of game-slaying manlihood, right here in this very issue.
The weather might feel hotter than the suns surface at the moment, but that doesn't mean us gamers have to concern ourselves with venturing outside and burning our pastey skin. Of course, last month also saw the incredibly crucial E3 expo roll into LA, showcasing just about every game you should be looking forward to playing in the next year or so. T1's own TurkeySaladBoy gives his, rather unique, take on the events – this isn't the usual "best game in X genre" bull crap. If you want to get an idea of what really goes down at these places, you've simply got to read this knee-slappingly funny piece.

FPS-fanatic Gow has been at it again too, this time tackling Zombie Studios' promising downloadable title, Blacklight: Tango Down. It has something like a gazillion combinations of weapon load-outs in a game that costs a meagre 1200 MS Points. Something has got to give with that, right?
Combine all of the above with top contributions from our stellar writing talent, including Sir Malthouse's anticipated review of Darkness Within 2: Dark Lineage; Kieran's quality MW 2 vs. Battlefield: Bad Company 2 feature; and Alec-Ross' immense 13-1 countdown of the best boss battles to ever get your fingers twitching, and you've got plenty to keep you busy while the heat makes the outside world as unbearable as cotton pants during a hip hop country dance (youtube it...).

Personal props this issue simply have go to the fantastically named The Bearded Ladies, who have swooped onto the PSN with Landit Bandit, their debut, new genre-coining release. We loved it so much we had the DrunkenGamer come up with a drinking game in it's honour.

Enjoy the issue folks. I know we did!

-Ed

About Thirteen1

Thirteen1 is an online gaming magazine based in East Yorkshire, United Kingdom.

Founded in March 2008 by three gaming enthusiasts, Daniel Allen, Craig Franklin and Paddy Fellows, the idea behind the site was a simple one, to provide gaming news and reviews written by gamers and for gamers. With this in mind they set about writing the first issue which was launched on the 13th of April 2008.

In August, Craig took a hiatus from the project to focus on his education and the team was joined by Daniel Gowen, an FPS nut with a great eye for graphics

From there the project grew and with the help of several volunteers and a new crewmember, Craig II, without whom the project would not be possible, a new issue is released every month on the 13th at 1PM.

Don't forget you can download the PDF if you fancy reading it that way. Print it off for the bathroom - we're a cracking toilet read!

For press enquiries please contact:

Craig Albeck or Daniel Allen

promotions@thirteen1.com
T: 01482 214 714

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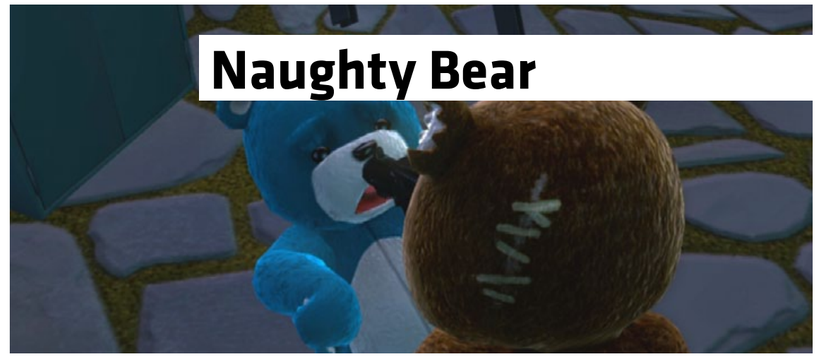
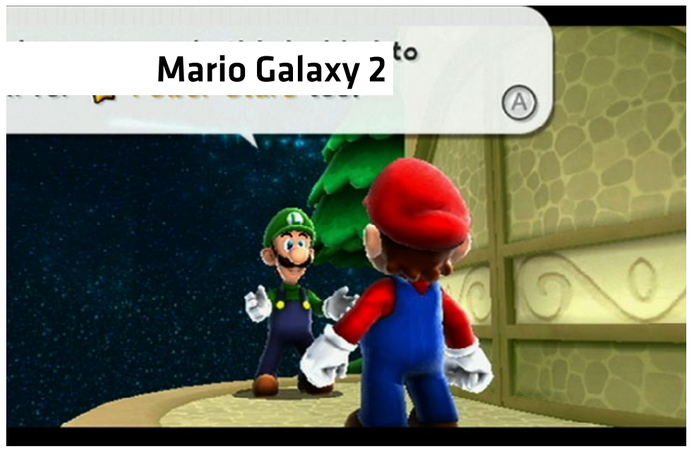
Finally, after all this time the badgering has paid off! Mid month we managed to get the badger recognised. If you play Adventure Quest Worlds, you can claim an in game badger helm!!! To celebrate our triumphant success... Well, you know the drill, find a badger and win a prize. Simples.... wait no, that's a meerkat?





Title: Mario Galaxy

Format: Wii

Mario Galaxy 2

By DrunkenGamer

While I have made no effort to hide the fact that, in the age-old 'Sonic or Mario' debate, my fanboyism falls squarely in the slipstream of the speedy blue one, it doesn't mean I would ever miss out on any of the podgy Italian plumber's titles.
In fact, in recent years the outings of Mario have stood head and shoulders above any of the Sonic releases. Personally, his most recent peak was Super Mario Galaxy. Now I'm sure that will cause much debate amongst both readers and other T1 team members, but I just prefer it over Super Mario World.

When I first played that game I was floored. The visually stunning worlds, the awesome gameplay and brilliant level design - everything about that game was spot on. Even something as simple as throwing yourself towards a small planetoid, hoping its gravity was strong enough to pull you the rest of the way, provided me hours of entertainment.
So with the standard set that high, Super Mario Galaxy 2 has one hell of a big pair of red dungarees' to fill.

The levels take the best elements from both 2D & 3D games, switching seamlessly.

The game starts with you heading over to meet Princess Peach to eat cake and watch the shooting stars fall in the Stardust festival . You know, the same festival that you were heading too in the first one..... the festival that only happens every 100 years....Yeah, story has never been the strongest element in Mario games.
So basically it's the same plot as always. Bowser has decided that he's going to rule the world/ universe again and every dictator's must have accessory is a damsel in distress. Ever one to stick with what he knows, he decides that Princess Peach is who he wants. That leaves Mario to chase him down, give him a good hiding & bring back the Princess.
Helping him in the chase this time is a group of Luma's (Sentient stars), lead by a large purple Luma called Lubba. He has built a ship to fly around the galaxy, and since one of the younger luma's has taken a shine to you, decides to lend you the ship to hunt down Bowser. It's at this point that the ship turns into a giant Mario head, for no apparent reason....looks good though.
Anyway, its here that you're introduced to the map for the game. This time they have decided to make a welcome return to the more linear style of world map. You progress from galaxy to galaxy in a more natural way than before, unlocking new ones by finishing others. Occasionally you will even come up against barriers that can only be passed by collecting a certain number of Power Stars in the other levels.

This brings us to the levels themselves. I already mentioned that the levels in the first Mario Galaxy were extremely impressive, which is why I am especially glad to say they have stepped their game up for this second outing. It would have been so easy for them to simply add a coat of gloss to what they already had – but that's not the case!
The levels here take some of the best elements from both the 2D & 3D games in the series, shifting seamlessly between the planes in some cases, and then pile on a whole truckload more. All of the levels show so much creativity that it's hard to imagine, let alone describe.

One world that stood out as an example was 'The Flotacious Blimp Fruit' level in the Tall Trunk Galaxy. The level begins in 3D with a very tall tree to climb, so you have to go to the bottom of the planetoid and grab your old pal Yoshi. Once you have him with you, he can eat the blimp fruit that allows him to float up the tree. When you are at the top you are sent, via sling star, to the next planetoid and the camera is seamlessly flipped to a 2D view.

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However this is a 2D view in a 3D world, so when you're on a cylinder shaped object you are able to throw yourself down a hole knowing full well you will go all the way round the log and come out at the top of the screen again. Genius.
Once you spin around the log a few times, collecting the broken parts of the next sling star, you are sent off to the next 2D section, which is a more classic 2D-environment on a single plane. Here you have to jump down to the bottom of the first path and then blimp fruit your way back up the other side to the star...

You'll notice from the above that, aside from the great design, there's another key element in this sequel - Power ups & Partners. This time out Mario does not have to go it alone in his hunt across the galaxy. Instead he is joined on various levels by both Luigi & Yoshi.
Luigi will pop up at regular intervals at the start of a level, offering you the opportunity to play the level as Luigi rather than Mario. This is effectively just a visual change, as Luigi plays identically to Mario.
Yoshi, on the other hand, really adds an interesting element to the game, bringing his own abilities and power ups, which as mentioned above have been woven into the level design.
My personal favourite is the Dash pepper. This powerful chilli causes Yoshi to sprint at incredible speeds, allowing him to traverse terrain he couldn't previously - vertical walls, for example.

Clouds

Not many people know this, but in Swahili, Mario translates to "cloud aggressor"... Ok, we made that up.

New partners' abilities and powerups have been woven into the level designs.

Retro

Still featuring some of the classic style gameplay we've all come to expect.

Don't think Yoshi is the only one getting some power up love though, Mario's arsenal has been seriously fortified as well. Making a return are the ever popular Fire Flower, as well as the Bee & Spring powers from the previous Mario Galaxy. Also added to this are new Rock, Cloud & Drill abilities.

When he has the rock ability, a simple flick of the wiimote will cause Mario to roll up into a ball of solid rock and hurl himself forward. This can be used to smash barriers that are otherwise unbreakable. The cloud ability allows Mario to become as light as a cloud, which means that when he jumps on a cloud in a level it doesn't vanish.
It also means that, while jumping, a simple flick of the wiimote will cause up to 3 new clouds to appear, allowing our hero to access new heights.
The drill is my personal favourite of the new abilities, due to how well the levels that use it have been designed. When used it will cause you to drill through the planetoid you are currently on, popping out directly opposite if there is nothing in the way or deflecting and bouncing off metal if you hit it on the way through.
One of the drill ability's earliest uses is even a boss fight, where you have to drill down at the right moment to attack the boss from below.

What makes all of this great is that all of the various level design elements, all of the new power ups, even the new friends, are scattered into the gameplay both naturally and regularly. This means that none of them ever feel overused, and the levels never hit a stagnant point like they can in other titles.

Gameplay is original and at no point becomes repetitive... A real treat.

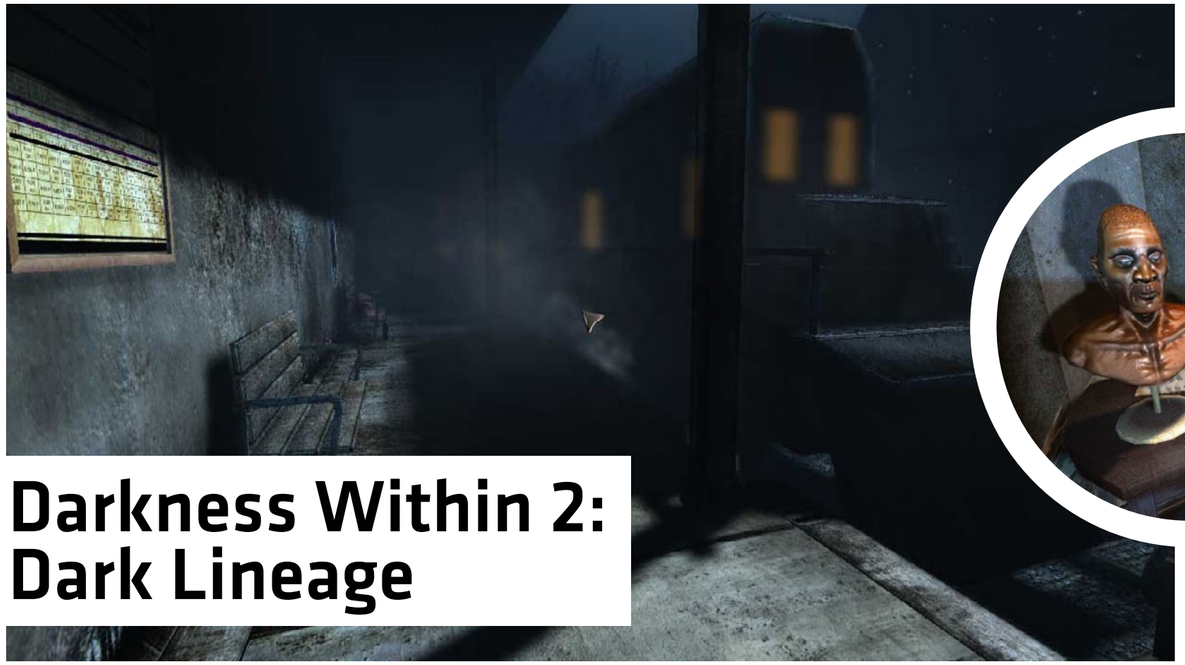
So, looking to wrap this up (so I can get back to the game and collect the extra stars I haven't picked up yet), has Mario Galaxy 2 managed to beat the first?
In a word - Yes. In two - Hells Yeah!

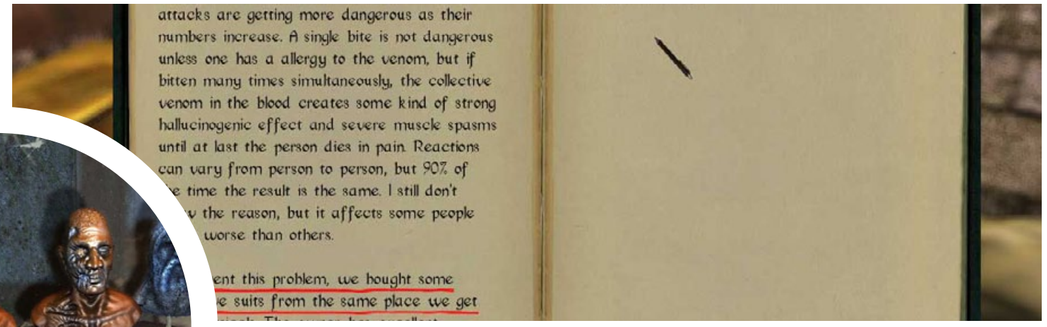
Oh you want more?
I honestly thought the first Mario Galaxy was incredible, and this goes so far beyond what that game created, taking the already solid gameplay and building on it in ways that I would have never thought. The levels are once again innovative and stunning. The gameplay is original and at no point gets repetitive. Throw in being a complete treat for the eyes and you have my new favourite Mario game.

You will have probably noticed that there isn't a flaw mentioned anywhere, so for balance I am going to mention the one and only flaw I found with the game - the extra lives you gain do not stay between play sessions. However this is only a really minor flaw, due to the fact you gain extra lives so fast that you don't even realise they were missing 10 minutes later.
So, even with that flaw, I am going to go ahead and give this game one of my rare perfect scores, and recommend that if you own a Wii and you have not bought this game yet, you're doing this gaming thing all wrong!

Title: Darkness Within 2: Dark Lineage

Format: PC





Darkness Within 2: Dark Lineage

By Scott Malthouse

The air was cool as I descended the stone mausolean stairs, reaching out into the eveloping blackness for something to keep me upright. The room stank of death as I delved deeper into the dreaded necropolis, some detestable ichor dripping from the ceiling onto my coat. I was witness to amorphous shadows creeping around me, possibly tricks of the wan moon. I approached a decrepit stone altar and beheld a basalt statue carved into an alien shape, a mass of tentacles protruding from what I was sure was it's cephalopod like face. I thrust it aside and saw that it was sitting atop a rectangular plastic box. I held my torch up to the cursed object and could not muffle the terrible scream that rang out of my lungs. The box read: Darkness Within 2: The Dark Lineage.

Lovecraftian horror is truly awesome. The idea is that humans are worthless, weak beings, and when confronted with the supreme horrors of the eternal cosmos they go a bit doolally. There have been

Right on the money; it evokes the atmosphere of Lovecraftian horror magnificently

Lovecraft inspired games in the past, such as Sherlock Homes: The Awakened and Alone in the Dark, but somehow they haven't really got the essence of this horror subgenre just right. Even Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth fell short of achieving this. But Zoetrope Interactive's Darkness Within 2: Dark Lineage is right on the money; it evokes the atmosphere of Lovecraftian horror magnificently and makes for a scary adventure game that's, sadly, not without its faults.

The main difference between the sequel and its predecessor, Darkness Wthin: In Pursuit of Loath Nolder, is the new engine. Whereas in the previous game you navigated by clicking through still images, you are now able to freely move around the environment, and with the new physics engine you can better interact with your surroundings, such as being able to chuck crates around.

The game opens with H.P. Lovecraft's most famous quote: "That is not dead which can eternal lie. And with strange aeons even death may die." Unfortunately this masterful quote is cheapened by someone reading it out loud, and not in any forboding and cool way, no - they just read it like they were reading ingredients on the back of a cereal box, which doesn't really set the mood very well.
Fortunately we are rescued by a creepy intro movie where the main character is being carted through what looks like the location they used to shoot the Hostel movies. He ends up in a sort of surgery

where grim men in white coats are preparing, when a tall corpse-like figure steps in to the room and stares at you for a while. The protagonist is then put out by one of the surgeons and it fades to black...
Now, while the graphics really aren't that great in this sequence, which could be because the whole thing has a blurred effect, it's sure high up there on the creepy scale.

You awake as the protagonist, Howard Loreid, in a wooden cabin, obviously drugged by someone and put there, and begin to get to grips with the controls. There are three modes of difficulty, with the lowest difficulty giving you hints as you play through. You collect your stuff using the left mouse to select items, with the cursor remaining in the centre of the screen at all times. It's a tested point-and-click formula, but the mouse does tend to drag a bit and feels a tad innaccurate as a result, even when you change the sensitivity level.
It's when you find the note your friend has left that you see how intuitive Darkness Within 2 is.

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Puzzling

You have to piece together the puzzle to work out the puzzle... puzzling eh?

When reading through notes you are told that there are X amount of clues hidden inside and that you must underline words or phrases that seem relevant. You are allowed unlimited tries, making it a little too easy to get all the information, giving the feeling that the game should have a time limit on these sections. Whatever clues you underline become ideas in Howard's mind for you to refer to, which you can access at any time with a click of the right mouse button. These ideas can be combined with other ideas and items to solve puzzles - a unique system worth plaudits. You can also examine objects you have collected from this screen and use them if the time is right.

The great lighting makes for a really forboding atmosphere and the sound effects are second to none.

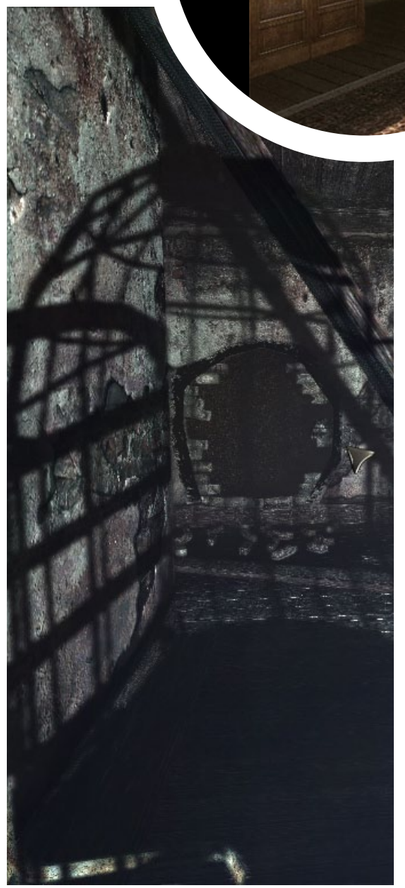
Chemistry

According to Semisonic, it's all about chemistry. In this case, they were wrong.

The game centres around an old town called Arkhamend, a play on Lovecraft's Arkham where the famous asylum is located. Howard is told to go there and look for the fugitive private investigator from the first game, Loath Nolder, but this soon sees him going on a much more dangerous and ultimately confusing quest to unlock the terrible secrets of the town and the link it has to his ancestors. Locations include a Victorian mansion, decrepit underground tunnels and a sinister forest where people have reportedly been killed by some sort of animal.

There's no doubt that you'll be genuinely creeped out when playing this game. The great lighting makes for a really forboding atmosphere and the sound effects as you explore the dingy town are second to none. You will hear creaks, moans and bangs, forcing you to look around and find that there's nobody there. Although the graphics aren't as polished as they could be, they enforce the general mood of the game well. The voice acting can be bit hit or miss, but there are some good weird characters to interact with on your adventure.

As with all adventure games worth their salt, you'll find yourself having to solve a plethora of puzzles on your pleasant journey into madness. Most of them require you to collect a bunch of items and information, meaning you will be doing a good amount of exploration. The only problem with this is that, with so many items and 'ideas' that can be combined, you will be spending a lot of time with our old friend Mr Trial and Error trying to figure out what fits where, which can get a bit fiddly.



Darkness Within 2 is ultimately a solid horror game that is guaranteed to send chills up your spine. Lovecraft fans will get a kick out of the references and easter eggs the developers have thrown in, like the basalt statue of Cthulhu, but non adventure gamers may have a hard time with it. The story may be as convoluted as hell, but you won't find many better Lovecraftian games out there.

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Title: Landit Bandit

Format: PSN

Landit Bandit

By Dan (Ed)

When an indie company proudly calling themselves The Bearded Ladies (and the award for "Best Company Name Ever" goes to...) bursts onto the gaming scene, you'd be right to expect something a little different. Landit Bandit, their first release, is something of a revelation for the PSN Store. Not only is it a cracking title worthy of your time, it's almost an entirely unique concept in the age of copycat companies and endless bedroom indies duplicating each other's designs.

To put it simply; Landit Bandit plays out like every other retro-advanced-casual-physics-based-chopper-game you've ever played. That'll be none, then...

Landit Bandit will be your first taste of the casual-helicopter-sim genre, and you'll be left hoping it isn't your last. This is a game full of charm and charisma, never taking itself seriously and expertly walking that fine line between tedium and "just one more try before bed, whoops another 2 hours have passed" addictiveness. While the £9.99 price point is undeniably steep for a debut release from a bunch of unknowns, especially for a game not even offering a try-before-you-buy demo, you'll have to trust us when we say the purchase is justified from that first moment you nail a perfect helicopter landing to the last.

A game full of charm and charisma, never taking itself seriously and addictive as hell!

The game's somewhat thin story centres around art thief Lander, who mysteriously washes up on a desert island and is confronted by chilled out local, Marley. Lander has an important upcoming meeting to attend with the aptly named "Mr Art Steeler" in the 'Big City', but it looks like the washed-up (heh) crook is stuck, thanks to the shark infested waters surrounding the island.

Pretty pissed off about it all, Lander throws his briefcase at Marley's head, causing it to open on impact and reveal the valuable contents inside – one of them being Da Vinci's original plans for a pedal-based flying machine. Luckily for Lander, Marley is quite the craftsman and soon puts it together for them both to use. The escape is on.

You take on the role of island inhabitant Marley, cruelly forced to do all the pedalling leg work by the beefier Lander while he lazily negotiates with locals in return for directions and tips on how to reach the 'Big City' and make his meeting.

Though it only serves as a way to stitch one stage to the next, the storyline is cleverly told through some funny, wonderfully drawn comic book style cutscenes, including humorous mumbled voice-overs to represent the characters talking to each other. It sounds just like a drunken friend who's trying to make a point when his tongue is moving faster than

Truly Fact...

The Swedish-based Beared Ladies sure know how to have fun – they even chose their company name by creating a script that picked out random words! Unfortunately, Massive Beaver Interactive didn't make the cut.

That's 100% true by the way..go on, ask them if you don't believe us!

his mind, something we're all too familiar with after the DrunkenGamer gets a few pints in him.

The meat and veg (or should that be shark and coconut?) of Landit Bandit's gameplay consists of taxi style pick-up-and-drop-off challenges around exotic, often dangerous, island locations, which you need to complete to pretty challenging timers. There are a few mini-games and other nice distractions thrown in to complement this, but it's definitely a taxi game at heart.
Being an early Da Vinci design knocked together with wood, your flying contraption is far from the sturdiest of aviation machines. Landit Bandit's constant challenge is in the steering and landing of your chopper, a skill that's easy to learn after a couple of attempts, yet incredibly difficult to master.
The basics have you use R2 to pedal and the left analogue stick to tilt in the direction you want to move, with L1 providing a speed boost and the D-pad revealing an overview map of your area, highlighting taxi jobs and the location they want to reach. Your helicopter comes with it's own health bar that's easily depleted by a few knocks and crappy landings, though you can keep it full by picking up cogs and receiving a boost from inhabitants when you taxi them quickly enough. Landing definitely proves to be the biggest challenge in Landit Bandit, as a swift drop from any kind of height usually spells disaster for the shaky wooden construct.
Your ability to speed boost is also governed by a quick draining energy bar, again topped up by collecting pick-ups and taxiing the locals in an efficient manner.
This risk/reward of deciding whether to choose speed and a bit of a bumpier ride in the hopes of a speed tip on completion (health/energy boost) is surprisingly well integrated with the challenging health management and timer, especially if you're desperately trying to earn one of the Gold, Silver or Bronze medals for your effort.

Steering and landing your chopper is easy to learn but difficult to master

Ninja!

Ninja ropes and helicopters... why aren't you playing this already?!

Casio

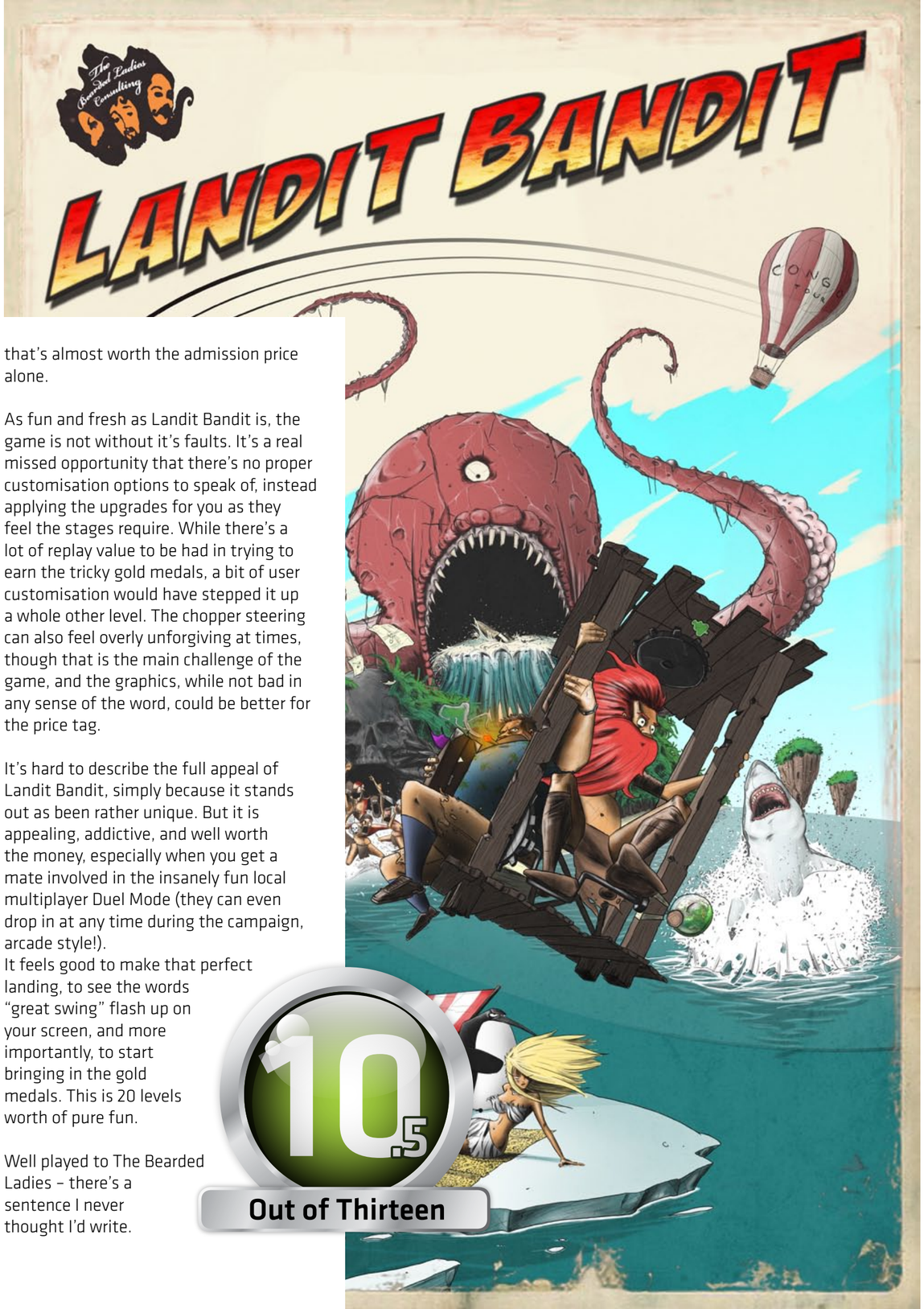
That's right the timer is a classic Casio watch. You can't get much more retro than that!

You'll meet a lot of colourful and genuinely funny characters during your adventure, many of them taking humoured pot-shots at the very principles of game design the Bearded Ladies have used – introduced immediately on the first stage by 'Standard Male Character', the character model you'll be taxiing around most of the time, with the simple-yet-effective line, "Hi, I'll be your standard male character".
New characters often add something new to your chopper, such as an attractive woman who makes locals literally jump into the taxi (removing the pesky need to land), a dragon being able to boost you around using his flame, and the undeniably stand-out spiderman-esque swinging ability provided by Mounty's bungee rope.
Landit Bandit's 5 different locations are varied and command different approaches to gameplay, from an icy tundra ruled by a penguin mafia, to an inspired and incredibly fun 2D side-scrolling section that's almost worth the admission price alone.

As fun and fresh as Landit Bandit is, the game is not without it's faults. It's a real missed opportunity that there's no proper customisation options to speak of, instead applying the upgrades for you as they feel the stages require. While there's a lot of replay value to be had in trying to earn the tricky gold medals, a bit of user customisation would have stepped it up a whole other level. The chopper steering can also feel overly unforgiving at times, though that is the main challenge of the game, and the graphics, while not bad in any sense of the word, could be better for the price tag.

It's hard to describe the full appeal of Landit Bandit, simply because it stands out as been rather unique. But it is appealing, addictive, and well worth the money, especially when you get a mate involved in the insanely fun local multiplayer Duel Mode (they can even drop in at any time during the campaign, arcade style!).
It feels good to make that perfect landing, to see the words "great swing" flash up on your screen, and more importantly, to start bringing in the gold medals. This is 20 levels worth of pure fun.

Well played to The Bearded Ladies – there's a sentence I never thought I'd write.



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Title: Crackdown 2

Format: X360

Crackdown 2

By Dan (Ed)

When it was announced that Ruffian Games were working on a sequel to Crackdown, Realtime World's 2007 hit, pretty much every 360 gamer who played the first let out a cry of unmitigated joy. There's just something forever appealing about playing as a super-powered hero in an open-world environment, and with new additions to the already solid formula and many of the bugs ironed out, Crackdown 2 simply couldn't fail to impress...right? Well..that depends on just how much you liked the original, because Crackdown 2 is basically the exact same thing. Imagine handing your home to a group of interior designers and leaving for 6 months while they went to work, only to return and find the exact same layout with a slightly darker colour scheme and a chair switched with a sofa. That's what you've got here.

There's a select group of gamers out there under the impression that Crackdown's success was only thanks to it being bundled with access to the Halo 3 beta,

A great looking opening movie sets the scene well... Taken on a montage ride of the city.

but that simply isn't so. The new franchise garnered a hell of a lot of praise and love from the many who enjoyed it, making a sequel all but an inevitability. It's a real shame, then, that Crackdown 2 feels like more of a rework than an improvement, heavily relying on the appeal of the original concept and a lick of paint to see gamers through a second instalment.
Don't get it twisted - Crackdown 2 *is* a hell of a lot of fun, providing many more hours of insane jumps, building-to-building parkour, explosive action and fast-paced driving. It just feels a bit...empty, for a sequel anyway, and will leave the majority of fans feeling ripped-off by the lack of progression and love invested into one of their favourite IP's.

If you've played the original Crackdown you'll know what the crack is here (lame pun, but had to be done). Crackdown 2 returns you to Pacific City with a decade gone by, now in total disarray thanks to an outbreak of mutated bastards causing all kinds of havoc at night, and terrorist outfit Cell ruling the streets by day.
A great looking opening movie sets the scene well, showing a news conference highlighting how crime is at an all time low literally blow up in their faces when a bomb detonates, killing several reporters. You're then taken on a montage ride showing the city going all kinds of post-apocalyptic mental, thanks to a surge in crime and strange, citizen hungry mutant freaks starting to emerge. You're a new nameless recruit of the

controversial Agency, sent out to put a stop to the madness and once again restore peace and order to Pacific City.
The premise is a tight one, acting as a perfect excuse to transform the bright, comic-book styled environments of the original game into a darker, apocalyptic setting, but story wise; well, that's it. The whole game is based on this opening sequence, never progressing or showing any interest in engaging you with an unfolding storyline to tell. Not cut-scenes between missions, no real characters of interest to speak of, and no ultimate story-driven goal to reach. Other than a few audio drops to collect that gradually unfold the story of the past, you're left to accept the opening movie as the setting and get on with the super-human destruction of enemy forces. You can argue that there's no need for a storyline in Crackdown – dialogue only gets in the way of vaulting over skyscrapers in an open-world anyway – but there's an unforgiving laziness about this approach. Ruffian, you could have least given us something!

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This general lack of narrative does serve as a way to truly open up Pacific City as a sandbox, pretty much allowing you total freedom to do whatever you like, whenever you like. It's cool being able to roam without the shackles of narrative direction, but it does give the frantic action set pieces an unfortunate, aimless quality.

Your core tasks are as follows: secure spots, kill everybody, move on - coming in 3 different disguises. The first is the securing of light generators, needed to trigger UV 'Sunburst' drops into key areas of the city to wipe out the mutant freaks. Then there is securing city spots owned by The Cell, which turn into handy Agency drop points for weapon/vehicle collection. Finally you'll need to make sure the freaks are incapable of rising to cause havoc, so you secure and fill in their breach holes (reminiscent of Gears of War's locust emergence holes), preventing them from using it to come from underground in the future. The latter two are handled well, really bringing Crackdown 2's day/night cycle into the game. The Cell roam the streets by day and the Mutants at night, meaning their respective bases are easier to takeover at set times due to less people being home. The night also serves as excellent levelling-fodder, providing wave after wave of mutants to mow down however you see fit.

The only thing is, much like the story, that is it for the main missions. You just carry out these 3 tasks over and over again, and there's very little variety on offer from one Cell base/breach hole/generator to the next. It's incredible fun blowing things up and jumping around like Bugs Bunny on crack, but when you're doing the exact same thing for the umpteenth time, even that can get repetitive.

Hmm

A battle between an armour clad, probably bulletproof, guy and a bloke in a hoody... wonder who'll win?!

Character progression is the same as in the first... Rewarding you with new abilities and unlockables.

Character progression is handled exactly as it was in the first, awarding you points in one of a number of areas depending on how you dispatch an enemy. Take them out with good old fisticuffs and your combat abilities improve, including the ability to pick up heavier objects to use as weapons and throw. Run enemies over and your driving skills increase, shoot or explode them and your shooting or explosive... you get the idea. The progression is well worked and easy to get to grips with, rewarding you with new abilities and unlockables, such as weapons and vehicles, at key stages of development. Using your skills to harm innocents or fellow Agency operatives will cause your stats to go backwards, just to keep you on the straight and narrow..like that's ever going to happen, especially when you can jump 50 feet in the air, rain down fiery hell using a rocket launcher, land, then pick up and throw a truck to finish them off.

Jump

If you ever find yourself in this situation remember, a chopper to the face bloody hurts!

The sequel comes with a few new weapons and vehicles, all of them fun to toy with. The Mutants are easier to kill with the new UV weaponry, meaning you're best off equipping yourself with a UV shotgun and grenades when night begins to fall. New transport comes in the form of a cool to use wingsuit, which you'll be familiar with if you played the demo but comes much later in the game than expected, and better powered agency vehicles – there are even helicopters to ride with!

The sequel comes with new weapons and vehicles, all of which are fun to toy with.

There are plenty of other activities on offer to keep you occupied. Crackdown's stand-out Agility Orb collection is alive and well here, serving as a fiendishly addictive way to eat up many an hour. The Orbs are impressively scattered across Pacific City's landscape, almost acting as a tour guide of the huge environment as you jump from one to the next on a collection spree. Crackdown 2 complements this with the addition of new Renegade Orbs, which zip around their surrounding area and prove a tough yet rewarding challenge to catch.

The Driving and Hidden Orbs are on offer too, as well as both street and rooftop races to keep you busy. If you're a fan of open-world gaming it's hard to feel bored in Crackdown 2, that's for sure.

Despite the obvious appeal of the

franchise to gamers, Crackdown 2 does very little to improve on the original. A major niggle from the first has been stamped out though, and that's the need to constantly return to the agency HQ when you want to equip a new weapon set or get your hands on a new vehicle. You'll now find that Cell spots are transformed to drop points when they're secured, offering numerous convenient locations for you to switch your artillery up.

Annoyingly, the parkour elements of the game are the same as before – bugs included! You can be seamlessly jumping from ledge-to-ledge and feeling great one minute, then cursing the game the next as you fall all the way down again, courtesy of jumping at something that you thought you could/should be able to grab. There's also a degree of fiddlyness involved at times. If you've ever played inFamous, you'll be quick to agree that Crackdown 2 would hugely benefit from Insomniac's ingenious soft-lock system.

The game has put a heavier focus on multiplayer action than the first, and it really works. You can now team up with 4 friends to tackle the campaign and roam the open-world, making the core of the game a little too easy but the exploration of Pacific City a whole heap of joy. There are special multiplayer Orbs dotted around the city, which you can see during single-player but can't collect, instead giving you a prompt to hook up with other gamers. Your campaign progression is saved if you're the host as well, meaning you can call on friends for a particularly tricky bit and finish off the rest of the game solo if you so wish.

Minigun

If I had to bet, I'd take the guy with the minigun any day.

Team up with 4 friends to tackle the campaign and roam the open-world.

WTF!?

What the hell is that tower in the background?!... oh wait, and that mutant thing ... what's that?

There are a couple of deathmatch modes on offer too, along with a Rocket Tag mode that has one agent trying to escape the others. It's undeniably awesome playing super-powered agent vs. super-powered agent in an open-world, though you'll probably have more fun exploring with your friends and getting creative with the interactable environments.

Crackdown 2 is a great game in the same ways that the original was, but that's about it. If you were a major fan of Crackdown or are yet to play the first, you'll probably love this. There are a few differences to keep you interested and, if anything, it's an excuse for more super-powered mayhem. However, those who didn't really buy into the concept of the original or expecting huge improvement from the first will get no extra joy here, and the lack of narrative progression is a genuine disappointment that many fans will struggle to overlook.

Runes of Magic
CHAPTER III
The Elder Kingdoms
Play Now
Free to play MMORPG
Can You Defeat the Demon Lord?

Title: Biker Battles

Format: PC

Biker Battles Hands-On

By Scott Malthouse

If you want to get anywhere in the MMO business the major thing you need is innovation. But the trouble is that there are so many ideas floating around out there that it's damned difficult to come up with a truly unique approach to gaming. Most browser games suffer from 'copycat syndrome', a condition where game designers flat out lift ideas from other, more successful games. Crime RPG 'Biker Battles' is one of the few games that actually seems to be innovating, at least at the moment anyway.

Inspired by his love for the TV show Sons of Anarchy, Biker Battles is the brainchild of one Stefan Gaasbeek and is currently in open alpha, meaning anyone can register a character and get playing - just remeber that because game is still developing you currently only have the bare bones to play with. However, Gaasbeek had a spark of ingenuity when creating the game, deciding that the players themselves should play a big role in forging the gameplay of the new MMO.

The amount of collaboration between player and designer has massive potential!

While you can play the basics of the game, which is a fairly simple crime RPG as it stands, you can also join other players on the forum, who are constantly coming up with new ideas to implement. Although the feature is still in its infancy judging by the small amount of threads it has, you can quickly see how crowdsourcing and MMO gaming go together like peanut butter and chocolate. Gaasbeek professes to reading every suggestion and will implement the ones that he thinks will work best. This amount of collaboration between player and designer has massive potential, especially if it continues through to the end product and beyond. Instead of one or a small team of designers racking their brains to come up with fresh and exciting features to get players rushing to sign up, Biker Battles could have hundreds of gamers pitching their own ideas, and with so many that could potentially be thrown out there, the liklihood is that there will be a couple of gems that will set the game apart from the rest.

The basic game sports some impressive looking cartoony art - indicating that you won't be playing this for its gritty realism. There are currently a number of features to toy around with, such as commiting crimes like stealing and selling motorbikes, robbing fellow bikers and doing random jobs. Each crime has you pick a certain object from a screen containing a few different items. Pick the correct one and you might get some cash and experience. Once you have a nice amount of wonga you can buy a stripclub to rake in some more doe. You can also join gangs, of which there is only one at the moment: The Hells Angels. Gaasbeeck says that gangs will be the most important aspect of the game and will feature 'ranks' and a management system.

Ever present in modern MMOs is the cash shop, where players can spend stone cold cash on virtual stuff. Biker Battles lets you buy skulls with euros to exchange for in-game cash, crates of weapons or grenades. It's not clear what grenades actually do, as there are no PVP features in the game yet, so in these early days it's probably best to just go for cash.

Impressively, Biker Battles is set to become a truly mulitlingual game, with plans for translations to Romanian, Polish, Spanish and even Arabic and Farsi. There are three servers at the moment that provide different languages and in-game currencies: German, Dutch and English.

So Biker Battles could be a truly innovative effort and a pioneer in crowdsourcing browser MMOs. If Gaasbeeck continues to uphold his 'players make the game' ethos, we could really see something special on the horizon. Defintiely one to keep an eye on – or even better, get involved with and help design yourself!

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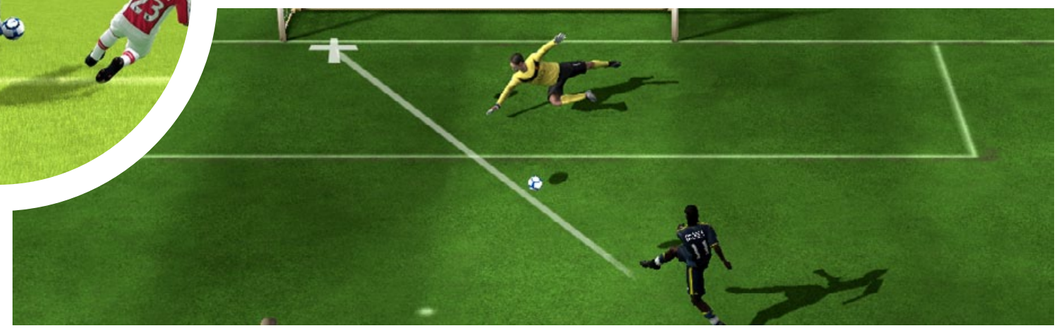
Title: FIFA Online

Format: PC



FIFA Online Beta Hands-On

By Stuart Morrison

"He cannot kick with his left foot, he cannot head a ball, he cannot tackle and he doesn't score many goals. Apart from that he's all right." I would have to agree with George Best if he was describing my footballing skills, but FIFA Online is set to change that with a free-to-play FIFA football game for the PC, packing a new simple control system that can even make me look more like Lionel Messi than Terry Hurlock.

I have always liked the FIFA games, going all the way back to the SEGA Megadrive days, but it doesn't mean I have ever been that good at them. FIFA Online is trying to grab the PC football market here, with a game that is quick and easy to get into but tougher to master. It is free-to-play but will use micro-transactions to buy various upgrades and other items, both practical and cosmetic.

FIFA Online is using a tweaked version of the FIFA 10 console engine, allowing a large degree of scaling so that you, whether you have a low end laptop or a high spec gaming PC, can try your hand at winning the league, world cup, or just beating your mates. It borrows the visuals and cut-scenes from the console FIFA 10 games, so you get that familiar EA FIFA game feeling from the kick off. It has the sound effects, commentary and similar music to FIFA 10.

The FIFA 10 engine allows a large degree of scaling for low and high end machines.

Impressively, Fifa Online launches straight from your internet browser, though it does require downloading and installing on your hard drive first - only about 1 gig, so not too bad. The FIFA Licence also includes all the proper players names and strips, and we even have Clive Tyldesley and Andy Townsend giving the commentary. There are a lot of little cut-scenes for goals, replays, people taking corners, goal kicks etc. It all adds up to make a pretty good looking and slick game.

FIFA Online is basically designed to be played with one hand. Using a mouse driven system, you move the cursor in the direction you want them to go, drag it further away and your player will run faster. A click of the left mouse button passes the ball and holding it in will loft or cross it, while right click is used to shoot. Without the ball, holding the left mouse button will make you press the opponent for possession, while a right click will let loose a sliding tackle. This new system flows well, is accessible and easy to get to grips with. There are also familiar set tactics that you can employ during a game with a single key press, both defensive and offensive, such as the usual Offside Trap, Counter Attack etc.

Three modes are available in the game: League, World Cup and Versus. In the League mode you choose to play as one of 500 teams from the 28 fully licensed leagues and try to guide them to league and cup glory. Playing and winning games earns you experience and currency, while your players gain experience and level up to become better. This is invaluable, which I found to my cost when I took Borussia Dortmund out into the Versus lobby and challenged someone who on paper had a worse team. I got thrashed 4-1 - his players were faster and could keep the ball better, advising that you had to play a lot of league games to get to that stage.

The World Cup is quite simple; take control of a team competing in it and take them all the way to the final. World Cup and Versus have the competitive multiplayer options, while league mode can be played co-operatively or solo. You can receive new players as a reward for completing an achievement or winning a competition. Handily, if you control a team in the World Cup that includes a player from your league team, they will also gain experience from that.

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In League Mode your players will get fatigued, so this is where your team management has to come into play. When do you rest players? Who do you bring in? What formation should you play?

There is a youth search so you can buy young level 1 players and train them up. There will also be a transfer market coming to the came for you to buy and sell players, though it wasn't ready for us to test while playing.

Fifa Online also boasts Live Event's, which have you play the week's most important match, examples would be during the world cup games such as Spain vs Portugal, England vs Germany, and in the future it could be the Milan derby, the Old Firm derby or the Manchester derby etc.. You can win exciting items for your league team by supporting (playing) one side in the most important match that week. There are also unlockable achievements for each mode, which can earn you more money and experience.

Although the game is free-to-play there will be micro-transactions for more items, from the purely cosmetic new outfit/strips, to the more gameplay impacting items like Defensive Shin Pads, which give your defender a '+6' boost to defence skills. More things will be added to the store as the game goes live.

Online

It's got "online" in the title, so of course there are little trinkets you can add to improve performance.

This game has a lot of potential and should get a large player base. A lot of that will be due to the EA and FIFA name, but that isn't a bad thing. The FIFA console games have come on in leaps and bounds and FIFA Online is based around the same engine, giving it a great platform to build on.

The game looks good, has a lot of options, and will bring a different option to the current football games in the PC market.

The game looks good, has a lot of options and brings something different to the PC.

Title: Lost Horizon

Format: PC

Lost Horizon Hands On

By Scott Malthouse

Tally ho, pip pip and other such nonsense. Nowadays the kids are too hopped up on their Pokemons and Michael Bay movies to give two toots of the vuvuzela about good old fashioned adventure. You know, exotic locales, mysterious ladies, treasure and all that jazz. Good thing that adventure game stalwarts Animation Arts, the developers of the popular Secret Files series, are giving it to us in spades in their upcoming release: Lost Horizon. This month I strapped on my flying goggles and played through a preview - and there wasn't an Optimus Prime in sight.

We begin with a prologue in Tibet, 1936, where a British cartographer recieves a strange artifact from a dying Chinese man whilst being pursued by Nazis. After escaping a large chamber with bizarre writing etched into the walls we cut to China, 1938 and our hero Fenton Paddock, a loveable rogue who is talking to his bartender friend, Shen, about the trouble he has got himself into with the local Tong Triads. After trying to chat up an up-tight singer Fenton has to distract the Tongs, who have just entered the nightclub and are guarding the door, so he decides to fill a wok with absynthe, set it alight and throw it across the crowded club. Classy, but it works. The controls are instantly familiar to anyone who's ever played a point and click title before: left click to use, right click to look. Scrolling your cursor to the bottom of the screen brings up an inventory where you can select which items you want to use. With the flaming absynthe, I took the drink and clicked on a wok before selecting Fenton's trusty lighter. Pressing the spacebar also shows you every clickable object in your surroundings, which is awfully handy and allows the painted backgrounds to remain unsullied by highlighted items.

Lost Horizon sports some beautifully detailed painted backgrounds.. A damned nice looking game

Speaking of the visuals, Lost Horizon sports some beautiful painted backgrounds with lots of detail, juxtaposed with 3D character models that have a bright, cartoonish look about them. This is a damned nice looking game.

Fenton returns to his air hangar where his friend/mechanic Gus is working on his plane, who tells Fenton that an officer is waiting to see him in his 'office' (read: shack). All of the characters have some great voice acting to compliment their zany, over-the-top qualities, especially the officer, Huxley, who clearly enjoys berating Fenton while attempting

to remain superior. Our dashing hero is summoned by Lord Weston to the Governor's Palace for a special assignment: to find his son, Richard, who never returned from Tibet with his cartography expeditionary force. From there the adventure really kicks off, solving puzzles and flying to exotic locations, such as Hong Kong and Berlin, to piece together the mystery of the lost expeditionary force. This really is a movie that you can play, one that harkens back to 1930s adventure flicks. There are a heck of a lot of cutscenes; sometimes you can go 10 minutes without having to click the mouse, which could be annoying for people who like to stay in the action in their games, but those who enjoy story more than gameplay will probably get a lot out of this.

Lost Horizon is certainly not a serious game though, as it parodies the genre and even throws in a few homages to adventure films. There are some genuinly funny parts in the game and most of the characters are entertaining, such as a boy who has bet his friends that he can catch a live bat - because apparently that's what kids like to bet on. There are some clever puzzles too, mostly involving combining items and using them in the correct way, like when you have to escape from a box that you are trapped in underwater.

Animation Arts have obviously put a lot of work into Lost Horizon and it really shows. The art and sound quality are fantastic and we look forward to what looks to be one of the best adventure games of the year. Roll on August so we can find out!

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Wish You Were Here!
WoW Cataclysm

As you all probably know, the World of Warcraft: Cataclysm beta started recently. Unfortunately it was a little too close to the issue and far too early in the beta to do a hands-on preview.
But that does leave an opportunity to start a feature that we have been contemplating for a while, Wish You Were Here. In this feature we will take some interesting screenshots around a game's world, effectively giving a photo tour of the stuff you want to see.
So for our first Wish You Were Here we have the world of Azeroth, a previously beautiful world that has been seriously battered by the emergence of Deathwing. Because of how big some of the changes are from pre-Cataclysm to post-Cataclysm, I will even include some comparison screenshots taken from the same place in both live & beta.
I do spoil you sometimes. Just buy me a pint to say thanks.

Before

After

Before

After

Before

After

Title: BF:BC2VMW2 TABFTFPS

Format: PC, X360, PS3

BF:BC2 Vs MW2

The abbreviated battle for top FPS or BF:BC2VMW2 TABFTFPS for short

By Keiren McSherry

Still unsure which of the FPS giants is for you? Feeling like a bit of a social outcast because you can't relate to your friends talking about the killer head-shot they made last night? Thirteen1's Kieran McSherry is here to save your day, and just as the prices are starting to drop too – read this guide, buy an FPS, and kill your friends (in the game!).

"Battlefield Bad Company 2" and "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2". Chances are if you're into games, console, PC or otherwise, you've heard of these two titles. They each represent the pinnacle of next generation first-person shooters (FPS) and even though they are both very different, each topped the sales chart upon release and are at the zenith of the most played games on Xbox Live & PS3 online. Both have an excellent development pedigree and both possess a backlog of impressive previous releases.

On paper, at least, Dice's "Battlefield: Bad Company 2" (BF:BC2) & Activision's "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2" (MW2) are nearly indistinguishable. But if that's true, how can they be so different, and more importantly, which one should you buy?

Basics / Single Player

The fundamentals of both MW2 and BF:BC2 are incredibly similar. Each console control system could be easily interchanged with little fuss. Analogue sticks dictate movement and visual direction: left trigger to aim, right to fire, while the D-pad is used for extra weapons and additional gadgets. This is the tried-and-tested console FPS format, and it works. Each system is completely customizable, from button layout to stick sensitivity. Their PC incarnations are no different, meaning, if you've played a modern FPS, you'll instantly know how these titles work. Also, at a glance, BF:BC2 & MW2's single player sections appear alike - but appearance's are often deceiving.

It's true that both titles flaunt incredible HD graphics and possess thought provoking narrative relating to current international issues (terrorism, the fuel crisis, globalization, etc.) and they both provide expertly crafted dialogue that's beautifully delivered. However, the tones of each story arc are entirely opposite.

MW2 depicts a grim, brutal and terrifying portrayal of warfare, complete with vicious close combat kills, strong references to war crimes, some utterly disgusting acts of violence and disturbing scenes of murder. MW2 inspires a great deal of emotion, all be it very macabre and negative; it reveals some stark, yet twisted truths. MW2 also contains a few stealth missions and makes use of some interesting first-person techniques. The whole package is a tense and frightening ensemble, sporting white knuckle gunplay and a well deserved 18 certificate. Infinity Ward have certainly set the bar high here.

BF:BC2's single player is a much more light-hearted experience. It's story centres around one squad, Bad Company. A foursome of f*ck ups thrown into the deep end of a Special Forces operation they know nothing about. It's an excellent tale with comedy, betrayal and superb characterisation. Its narrative focuses on the camaraderie formed between soldiers in combat and the absurdity of war (Catch 22.... anyone?). BF:BC2 also has a deep and varied vehicle section, where players can pilot anything from quad bikes to battle tanks and gunships. Gameplay wise, BF:BC2 encourages cover use, mobility and adaptability. Flank enemy machine gun nests and fire teams or wind up a ventilated mess. Battlefield also has a slight strategical facet, demanding players adopt alternative battle plans and utilise a plethora of weaponry to survive.

Both campaigns are around 4 – 5 hours long and of the highest calibre. Which is better comes down to personal preference. Tension and immersion over strategy and variety....

2 whole heaps of awesome

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Multiplayer

Online was always going to be the arena where these two titans did battle. The FPS genre is so old now that even the most astounding and innovative single-player experiences can feel like re-hashed, carbon copies of much loved titles, long since past. Regardless, both MW2 and BF:BC2 have enjoyable and incredibly popular multiplayer options, building on the popular moulds of old to offer the best experiences available. Each are very different with their own, unique, play style and corresponding set of problems.

MW2's multiplayer is based around lightning quick reactions and pin-point accuracy. Many of the in-game environments are urban, with lots of tight alleyways and indoor fighting. MW2 does have a set of outdoors-y maps, but even these are divided up by and comprised of smaller, close-in sections. Infinity made their environments this way for one purpose - to force players together in a destructive, bullet-and-shrapnel filled mash up. This creates an extreme and competitive multiplayer experience, where enemies could be (and usually are) behind every corner. The bad side of Infinity's map constructs is that it often restricts players. In any given map there are, literally, only a few avenues of approach, meaning participants often feel confined and larger games seem overly claustrophobic.

Humour

This screenshot has none.

Holiday

Well, that's the last time I book on Expedia. No wonder it's cheap!

Players can customize their soldier's load out with a simple but expansive class system. An incredible amount of weaponry is available, ranging from the humble 9mm pistol to light machine guns and 50 cal. sniper rifles. A range of explosives, optics and various weapon accessories (such as silencers and heartbeat sensors) are on hand, permitting players to create specific kits for specific situations. MW2 also has an awesome and well balanced 'perk' mechanic, representing your soldier's specialities. If you like the idea of a covert close combat killer, you can do that. If you prefer the premise of an explosive crazed, RPG brandishing, psychopath; the option's there. Infinity has created a very complete and concise customization section, catering to many different play styles. Every weapon, attachment and perk has to first be earned through a standard rank / experience system.

MW2 also has a large number of maps and game types, ranging from simple Free for All's to Capture the Flag and Headquarters (capture & defend.) Vehicles are present in MW2 but players are unable to pilot them, they are just bestowed for successful kill streaks as an in-game reward system. The best gamers can hope for is the gunner seat on one of the orbiting murder machines. A helpful 'death streak' is also present, which grants a slight boost or advantage for combatants who keep getting their

Teamwork Vs Fragfest...

asses handed to them. It's a very balanced and complete system, well thought out and executed. The only fly in the ointment is the inability to fiddle with your classes in-game. Teamwork is not one of MW2 strong suits. Its multiplayer function has no way to effectively organize your side. Only the fairly rudimentary Xbox live party system, and even that is restricted in many game types. This makes it difficult to coordinate even very simple team strategies. Not that it'd matter with most Call of Duty players. They interact, but it's rarely helpful and will usually only serve to frustrate you further. Almost all in-game communication is smack talk or whiney, wobbly throated children bitching, as they stuff semi-chewed cheeseburgers down their swollen, distended gullets. There are plenty of cheaters too. Spend any reasonable amount of time playing and your inbox will be flooded by propositions of hackers offering to level your account. For a price, of course. It is a testament to how outrageously popular this franchise has become, but that makes the prospect of large-scale gamer indecency no less appalling. MW2's multiplayer focuses on the individual. Allowing players to become a one man wrecking crew, but that, in turn, means team play suffers. A slight malfunction, in an otherwise efficient and well designed machine.....

BF:BC2's multiplayer is quite different, but by no means less enjoyable. It's map constructs and in-game environments are much vaster than that of MW2's, but they are also less detailed. Every terrain, from tundra to jungle, is covered, each with a selection of close quarters sections and wide open expanses. DICE's terrain grants an immense amount of freedom and gives players the ability to effectively out manoeuvre their foes, either by flanking or sneaking up on them from behind. Almost every piece of in-game cover is entirely destructible. Meaning the concrete bollard you're hiding behind wont stand up to much explosive punishment before leaving you exposed to enemy fire. DICE's constructs work well, allowing players to attack and counter at every range. The result is a true, server based, field of battle.

BF:BC 2 also allows soldier customization via class selection. There are four kits, each with their own specialisations. Assault and Medic classes excel at chewing through enemies; they can also heal, revive and resupply teammates. Meanwhile, the Recon and Engineer classes are great for dealing with vehicles, as they have the most effective options concerning explosive and armour piercing weaponry. They both rely heavily on subtlety and stealth. Recon works well when identifying enemies and engaging at medium-to-long range, while the Engineer's sub-machine-gun tears through enemies up close and his drill can repair allied vehicles. Each of the classes are vital to any successful team and can be further customized with gadgets, optics and upgrades. Like MW2, each of these special rewards are unlocked through a standard experience and levelling system. The range of hardware on offer is stunning. Everything from WWII small arms to mortar strikes, flak cannons and rapid fire grenade launchers are available. Vehicles are, of course, present. Players have full control over their chosen toys and can be lethally efficient with a pilot/gunner combination.

BF:BC 2 has only a few game types: Conquest, where teams compete to capture flags while controlling territory; Rush, where one team attempts to demolish the defender's communication stations; and a simple Squad Death Match. For it's lack of game modes and few maps (when compared to MW2) there's a surprising amount of ways players can aid their team. Battlefield titles

have always revolved around giving players the ability to adopt any battle role they desire - a relatively untouched concept for console shooters.
Teamwork is heavily encouraged. BF:BC2 has a simple and intuitive squad system that allows players to group up in cells of four. Indeed, any successful team must work together and have a variety of different class types and vehicle pilots if they are to triumph. In-game communication is sparse, with most squads keeping to internal party chat. Battlefield's system actively promotes and rewards teamwork however, so cross-squad voice communication is advantageous but not essential. Bad Company offers so much freedom, both in a literal sense and in the amount of actions players are capable of. It's a deep, intelligent and multifaceted multiplayer experience.

If In Doubt

If you ever get caught in a battlefield... don't be afraid to run away screaming like a little girl.

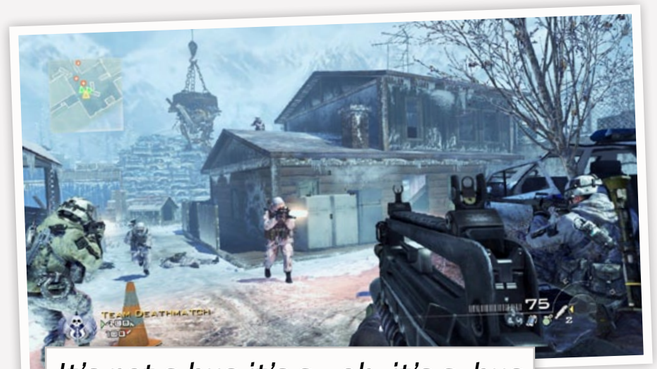
littered with graphical glitches, texture errors and busted game mechanics. The online battlefield veteran system doesn't work properly; along with the kill-count mechanic for certain weaponry. Various animations repeat or leave you stuck, like back-stabbing or reloading, and some firearms and gadgets are over or under-powered. Indecency is rife too, especially within the Conquest game type. A skilled and well organized team will easily outclass a lesser side, forcing them back to their un-capturable base, which then becomes a killing field for score hoarders. This phenomenon is affectionately known as 'base rape' within the Battlefield community. Cheap shots aside, there are many technical issues with BF:BC2 that require repair. Someone should crack the whip and get those pasty, mindless, dead eyed drones at EA working....

Bugs / Exploits

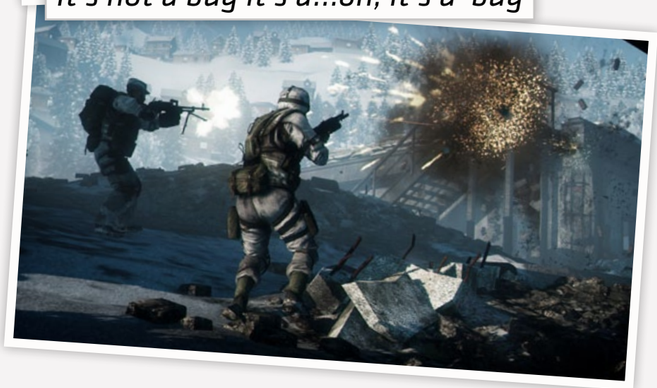
Both MW2 and BF:BC2 have flaws, pretty serious ones at that.

It is true that Modern Warfare holds up well on console. Over both Xbox Live and PS3 online, Activision's title works fairly seamlessly with few hiccups or graphical glitches. Its PC incarnation is another matter entirely. MW2 has no dedicated servers, relying instead on Infinity's 'host' system. This results in hideous lag for an insane amount of PC fans, which nearly renders MW2 unplayable.
If nothing else, this inherent problem makes MW2 a very difficult recommendation for PC owners. A shame, since the spawning mechanic and team balancing elements of MW2 work very well. Unfortunately, the epidemic of cheaters easily makes up for any alleviated frustration.

DICE's title has more wrong with it, but does utilise a dedicated server system, making it far more appealing option for PC gamers. BF:BC2 is



It's not a bug it's a...oh, it's a bug



So which is for you?

Which of these two titles is better comes down to personal preference. Their unique game elements and mechanics will appeal to entirely different audiences.
If you're a constant climax kind of gamer, who digs always being in the thick of it, watching as your teammates are ground up around you, explosions and muzzle flares everywhere, Modern Warfare's multiplayer is likely your cup of tea.
If you prefer vehicle combat, strategy, teamwork and variety, Battlefield is your outlet. Of course, there will also be a few freaks in the FPS world that enjoy both titles, for their respective merits and flaws.

Whichever category you fall into, whatever format you play on, these two are the big boys of modern FPS.

Gamers, choose your weapon.

That's right, there is no winner, they're both freaking awesome in their own ways! Kinda like chocolate and cheese, they're both made from milk, and they're both awesome... This was going somewhere...

Title: Castle of Heroes

Format: PC

Castle of Heroes

By Scott Malthouse

Normally browser based MMO's get tragically overlooked, but they really shouldn't. They have one strength over full MMO's in that they can be played anywhere you can get an internet connection. And that's a hell of a strength.

Castle of Heroes, a hugely popular free-to-play game published by the guys at gPotato, puts you in the place of a group of heroes caught up in the war between four playable races. By taking on the enemies that roam the lands, you gain experience and items to enhance both your army and Castle.

The fights play out in a strategic turn-based manner, where your army is shown on one side of the battlefield and the enemy lines at the other. You can either jump in and manually control the battle or sit back and watch as the battle plays out for you, reminiscent of the classic 'Heroes of Might and Magic' series.

Fights play out in a strategic, turn-based manner with you one side and your enemy the other

As you progress up the levels you will find yourself switching between finding things to kill and heading back to your castle to spend your hard earned resources. You will use your spoils to replenish your lost forces as well as building or upgrading segments of the castle.

Castle of Heroes falls into that nice area of gaming where it has simple gameplay at it's core, but once you get into it and scratch the surface there is a lot to do and learn.

After a successful launch and great player feedback, gPotato recently released the first expansion for the game. Called 'Babel', it adds several new features to the mix, including one known as 'The Tower of Babel', for which the expansion is named. The Tower of Babel is an interesting feature that houses a total of 40 battles, each containing a progressively more powerful guardian. As you defeat each of the guardians you are given the choice to move on to the next one.
If you choose to continue the rewards will get progressively better as a result, however this comes with a risk. Fail on any floor and you will lose ALL of the rewards you have earned up to that point.

This is a very interesting risk/reward idea indeed. Because you can only make one attempt at the tower each day, you will have to think hard as to when you drop out. Will your forces hold up to one last floor, or do you run away with your spoils?
Another new feature particularly worth noting are the new world buildings. Because resources are a core part of the game they have added capturable locations in various spots across the map.
Once a building's guardian has been defeated, the hero that you use in the attack will become that building's guardian for up to 12 hours. The building can still be attacked and taken by other players, but the longer you defend the more resources you will gain.

But again this has an element of choice about it, as you will need a powerful hero in order to defeat the guardian and then defend the building. However, once done you lose access to the hero for quite some time.

Buildings and their benefits...

Which building you take dictates which type of resource you will gain. Here is the list of buildings and what each will reward you, to give you an idea of what the developers are going for:

Ivory Tower - This building's reward is Experience
Merchant Market - This building's reward is Gold
Dryad's Vault - This building's reward is Wood
Dwarf Mines - This building's reward is Ore
Alchemy Lab - This building's reward is Sulphur
Pixie Workshop - This building's reward is Crystal

In order to a find out how the expansion has been received by the players, a little bit of insight into the development and hopefully a little bit of news about what we can expect next in the game, I decided to talk to Gabor Gyarmati, Producer of Castle of Heroes.

So with the Tower of Babel expansion out for a while now, how have the players taken to the expansion as a whole?

The Tower of Babel was very positively received by the players, everybody appreciates the new content.
The Tower of Babel itself in particular is very popular since it is challenging for players of all level ranges and holds very valuable items for those who manage to last long enough.

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What would you say was the most surprising thing you saw in the expansion after it went live?

That would be the Boss monster encounters for me. With the introduction of the new expansion, very powerful monsters roam the country and players have to defeat them and their minions. When the first bosses appeared, the entire community participated in the search for those bosses, coordinating attacks and sharing the best strategies with each other.

How difficult is it to get to the top of the tower of Babel? How often do the players make it all the way up?

Thankfully, the design of the tower of Babel allows players of all levels to accept the challenge, it is not exclusive to high level players. However, to reach the top of the Tower of Babel, you need a combination of a very advanced hero, an excellent army and good combat tactics. Some players have managed to reach the top floors of the tower by successfully defeating the guardians and have gained access to the massive amount of rare and powerful treasures, and of course the experience reward.

The new world buildings seem extremely useful, how often do they change hands amongst the players?

You are right, the new world buildings are quite powerful and are therefore heavily contested on a daily basis. I can't tell you exactly how often players fight over those world buildings per day, but they are hotspots in the game and players better come prepared!

It's always a worry with expansions that the gap between new and old player grows, have you done anything to help new players catch up?

The first thing we did was make new servers available for our French, German, English and Polish players and this decision was very well received by our communities. Our player base is constantly growing and we intend to introduce new servers regularly.
There are also new quests in place that allow new players to progress faster in the game than they previously could.

Do you get much time to jump into the game yourself since the expansion has launch and do you find it useful to do so?

All of us [the Castle of Heroes team] are playing the game in our free time and there is simply no better way to know if the game works as intended and what the community thinks or cares about.
During the day, our GMs monitor the game worlds but are not actively playing since we are constantly working on new content.

As we all know, MMOs never stop development. Are you able to give us any hints as to what the players can expect in the future?

We do not want to give too much away yet, but our developers are working on several ideas that we are all very excited about already. One of those new features allows several players to join forces to defeat very powerful enemies.

We will release more information about new content on our website, which you can find here: http://heroes.gpotato.eu/. If you don't want to check the website constantly, the easiest way is to subscribe to our RSS feed, follow us on Twitter or become a friend of Castle of Heroes on Facebook.

I hope we will meet in the world of Gaia!

Title: E3

Format: Conference

T1 Does E3!

By TurkeySaladBoy

Bangin' music, flashing lights, scantily-clad cosplay girls, and enough energy drink to power a Left 4 Dead zombie army. An average weekend in the Thirteen1 office? Not quite. This is E3 baby! We sent Turkeysaladboy off to LA and all he came back with.. was his alternative picks from this years carnival of gaming. Be prepared, we did mention alternative.

Southpeak are looking for a world record for "most spell combinations in a video game"

SouthPeak Interactive/ TopWare Interactive, Two Worlds II.

OK, I'm not too hot with numbers, so bare with me. Two Worlds II is the sequel to Two Worlds, an open world RPG in the style of Oblivion that made its début on the PC in 2007. According to the PR squadron on the show floor - including the unrelenting Jake DiGennaro - Polish development studio, Reality Pump scrapped original plans for an expansion to the original game. Instead, they sought to create a sequel with an entirely new engine, Grace, with simultaneous platform development factored in from the start. That's right, no lazy ports being offered from Reality Pump. And Grace is being offered in spades, none more so than in the intelligent art direction. Meticulous attention to detail has so far been achieved through gorgeous 3D textures, bump-mapping – there are no flat surfaces in the game – authentic weather effects, even bendy grass. Dynamic lighting casting creepy shadows on stunning environments, like on the castle dungeon walls, and cool physics come in the form of tumbling crates and swinging chandeliers.

The cod-Shakespearean dialogue has been dropped, and replaced with a much more authentic dialogue – the designers at US-based publisher, TopWare Interactive had something to do with this. Some clever cinematography has been applied to how the player and NPC engage. As the camera pulls back, the background blurs out subtlety to focus your eyes on the dialogue of the character while you are given the option to

pace around – not rude at all! On a related note, decision making is important. Some story elements will only unfold to players that make specific decisions, like maim the witch or accept her quest, so be prepared for a haunting if you make an ill-judged decision.

DiGennaro is particularly proud of the innovative crafting system, calling it "1 of a kind". There is no tree system. Instead, players collect cards questing, looting and toiling. Cards can be modified, or put another way, broken down into smaller parts, enabling players to build their own spells - even name them. What's impressive is they slowly improve over time. Southpeak Interactive are in the process of applying to the Guinness Book of World Records for the "most spell combinations in a video game". Whilst its obviously impressive, the combos will need a tutorial or face an epic fail.

Credit where its due to Reality Pump for their ambitious attempt to bring the control system and HUD of a typical MMO to the console. With Two Worlds II its possible to map equipment loadouts to hot keys (or d-pad on console, X360), then hit a button and instantly switch between equipment and spells at will during battle. The cinematic cut to some of the flourishes you can pull off is quite impressive: camera slo-mo effects with Matrix-style rotation.
The single player campaign offers 40 hours of gameplay – not including sub-quests and back story. Single player and multiplayer characters are independent of each other. DiGennaro is tight-lipped on the multiplayer features, although he's billing Two Worlds Two as being, "closest to an MMO you'll ever get on the console". As well as PvP, expect special challenges in co-op mode. Play like an old-school dungeon-crawler. Get killed and re-spawn at the start.

The Two Worlds franchise – yes, that's the original, plus the latest outing, Two Worlds II – boast a 7 year development history, but its fair to say Reality Pump are making discernible progression. Two Worlds II is 30% bigger than the original (or 60 square kilometres). RPG fans will love it – the customization especially. September 14 is the scheduled launch for the North America market. We'll be watching closely.

Console Wars

The big three console heavyweights locked horns in the PR equivalent of a professional sumo wrestling flab-off. Nintendo reminded everyone that it takes more than an interface to please gamers; its the overall gaming experience. Something that Nintendo have aimed for, and achieved, since the beginning. Its somewhat apt that Nintendo then went on to unveil their successor to the DS, Nintendo's 3DS. Its smaller, lighter, and has a longer battery life. The best news: it's fully backwards compatible. We learned about a few other outstanding features.

The 3Ds is a trailblazer in that its the first portable gaming console offering a genuine, jaw-dropping 3D experience. Like its predecessor, the 3DS features two screens - a touch screen on the bottom that's similar to those found in the Nintendo DS, and a large widescreen at the

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top. That top screen is where the magic happens, as it's capable of producing 3D imagery without the aid of dork-inducing glasses or an extra peripheral. Several features have been squirrelled out of the technicians at the Nintendo laboratory to enhance the user's gaming experience; a motion sensor, gyro sensor, and an analogue pad. The device comes equipped with a two cameras, which allow the user to take 3D pictures. Shipping with a built-in web browser, connectivity is at the heart of the 3DS, enabling over the air software updates across a Wi-fi connection, as well as the ability to download new data from another 3DS.

The graphical horsepower produces visuals that are on par with (or in some cases, surpassing) Sony's PSP, with screen resolution rising to 800x240 across its 3.5 inches (matron!). If you don't want every experience in 3D you can simply turn it off via the easy-to-access slider. Just make sure you are looking at the screen head-on otherwise you'll end up bog-eyed.

The release schedule of new titles will showcase the imagineering of the 3DS. Nintendo fan boys, and girls, will endure sleepless nights in anticipation of titles like Kid Icarus: Uprising – an overdue return to the gaming arena; Mario Kart – the shells actually make you duck; StarFox; Animal Crossing; Nintendogs 3D and Paper Mario. Third party contributions are equally as impressive: Street Fighter; Assassin's Creed; Final Fantasy; Metal Gear Solid; Fifa (that's right); and Saints Row. The rumour-mill has been working overtime, but alas, there is no confirmed release date for Europe. Fingers crossed grandma survives another bleak winter.

Not to be outdone, Microsoft unveiled (another) new iteration of its XBOX 360 console, as well as a clever re-branding of hands-free motion-sensing device, Kinetic (previously Project Natal). The sexier, sleeker, even quieter, XBOX 360 console features a 250GB hard drive, built in wireless and the carrot; compatibility with the hands-free interface, Kinetic. Will ship in the UK July 16th.

We saw Kinect come to life with Kinectimals, a pet simulator featuring a virtual tiger!

Unlike the motion-control systems being offered from Nintendo and Sony, Kinect doesn't use any sort of controller. The Kinect camera technology detects and tracks your full body and corresponding movements, so when players swing their hands or kick their feet, the games that support Kinect read these movements and translate them into in-game actions. Kinect has brought Steven Spielberg's vision of the future in Minority Report forward to today, in that it can be used to navigate the XBOX dashboard and Zune movie player backwards and forwards with simple hand movements. North America should prepare for a November 4 launch, but no information in the public domain, or otherwise, regards price and bundles.

Kinect is a much cooler name than Project Natal anyway (EDS Note – Really?!), and we saw it come to life with Kineticimals. A pet simulator featuring a virtual tiger - much safer than owning a real one. A young girl interacted with the virtual tiger, which she named Skittles (fur enough), via a series of strokes and gestures. The emotional reaction of Skittles was impressive; pawing the screen and reacting to the young girls facial expression. Chomski proved animals are not stupid, and they know just how to manipulate their owners. It leaves a few unanswered questions though related to inactivity in front of Kinect: can we expect a virtual poo? Naughty Skittles! Time will tell. Kinectimals will be one of the launch titles on November 4.

Disclaimer: despite coming up with the name Skittles, the young girl was not harmed in any way during the demonstration.

Sony played the "native" 3D gaming card, but supported this claim with stunning visuals; demonstrated its Move controller; and unveiled a subscription service set to leave console owners non-Plus-sed. Fan faring from the pedestal of their expansive stage, the big wigs at Sony proclaimed they are driving gaming into a genuine 3D age. Just a shame we all had to look like dorks wearing the glasses. Killzone 3 from Guerilla Games was the poster-child for Sony's 3D vision. Its been developed with 3D compatibility in mind from the ground up and honestly looks like a prom queen from a bygone era. Sumptuous in-game footage showcasing the games massive environments, intensive fire fights and the ability to pilot around the terrain on a gun-mounted jet-pack had everyone salivating. Sony provided assurances Killzone 3 will be Move compatible in time for its February 2011 release, and has all the signs that it will the next killer IP. Best get saving for that expensive Bravia HD TV as well.

The Move is Sony's version of the Wii mote, "but with buttons", as the big chiefs were quick to point out. Like all good double-acts, it cannot exist without the Navigation Controller: the equivalent of the Nintendo Nunchuck – see a pattern? Move functions by using a combination of accelerometers, gyrometers, and magnetometers. Despite giving the wand the appearance of a clunky glow-stick, the bulb on top of the Move talks to the PlayStation Eye to create accuracy. The colours can also change shade to help the PlayStation Eye better track movement in case a particular room environment has similar colour schemes.

The same Sony chiefs proclaimed Move as the most precise motion controller on the market with its 1 to 1 tracking. A demonstration of Sorcery, a cartoon third-person Harry Potter tribute, where you run around a 3D environment slashing away at angry-looking bad things, was a testament to this.

We also took a swing at Jon Daly. Well, his Prostroke Golf tie-in, to be published by O Game. Its one of the launch titles for the Move. Credit must go to UK's Gusto Games for recreating the authenticity of

golf with the Move controller. A drive responds to your grip and swing, twisting and bending in the respective directions, and the sensitivity of the Move enables you to perform a variety of different shots – FOOOOOOOUR! Although we only got to sample the driving, we anticipate Gusto to drive a better than par golf simulation into retail later in the year. Not sure about Daly's gaudy pants though.

The Move wand and Navigation Controller will bizarrely be sold separately at $49.99 and $29.99 respectively. There is also a bundle that includes one Move controller, a PlayStation Eye Toy and a copy of Sports Champion – one of the Move-supported titles that will ensure the legend of Robin Hood lives on - for $99.99. The official European launch is September 15, and the 19th in North America.

Plus, another major announcement, was Sony's not-so-subtle attempt to squeeze more money out of their supporters with a premium subscription service. Plus will combine a special package of free download titles – although vague on the details – early demo and beta access, an automatic patch downloader and an interactive magazine (a-hem). You can take advantage of a 12 month Plus package for £42 of your hard-earn cash or a price sensitive £13 for 90 days.
Note: Plus will not impact on the existing free services (phew). The real value will be realised in the games released specifically for the service.

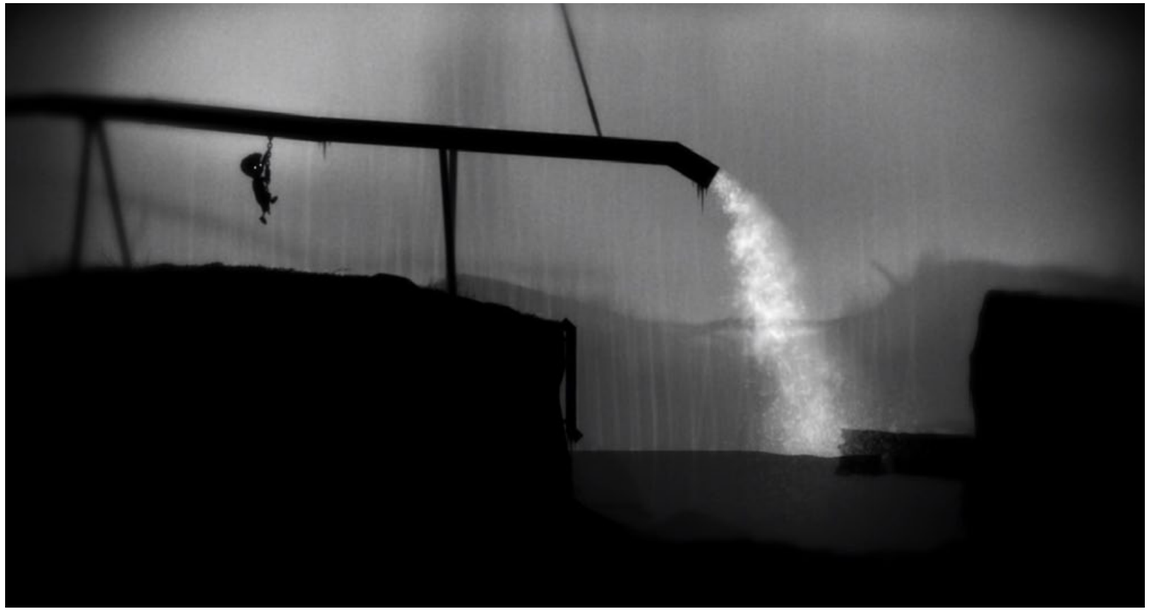
The killer combination of the PlayStation Move controller and 3D gaming will finally put the gamer, "physically in the game". As the big wigs added, "For the first time in motion gaming, core gamers will find something challenging and rewarding". Despite a pornographic looking slew of releases, it remains to be seen, although your street cred is at risk with the glasses (sold separately).

Disney, Tron Evolution.

The booth lured in the media like a moth to a cyberpunk illuminate ball of light. Once inside, the nostalgic look and feel of the stark neon piping over black was mesmerising. Although much of the gameplay was kept under wraps, the two of the most exciting features were laid out in their full glory: parkour and light-cycle racing. Everybody wants to run up buildings like the bad assess in Diehard 4.0; well now you can, but with a purpose: avoid the deadly Abraxas virus. The light-cycle racing is slick and exhilarating. It smacked of the influence that Disney-owned Black Rock Studios have brought with their console racer, Split/Second. Although you can't obliterate the environment like in Split/Second, you can chose alternative paths at break-neck speeds. We so want to own the Tron tank. Tron Evolution is staged before the events of upcoming film, Tron: Legacy – no spoilers I'm afraid. Tron Evolution should be heralded as a shining example of what can be achieved when the film crew and game developers genuinely collaborate.

Playdead, Limbo.

If this game was an angel, then carry me up to heaven right now. Limbo



is one of the most beautiful gaming experiences around. Noir is power, in this stylish black-and-white side-scroller that is guaranteed to evoke goosebumps and choke up even the most manly of Alpha-males. Its coming to XBLA as part of Microsoft's Summer of Games on July 21.

The experience revolves around exploration and experimentation, as you are tasked with helping the boy – his name remains shrouded in the same black and white secrecy of the game - find his estranged sister. Unlike the boy in the game, the softly spoke but easy-on-the-ear CEO, Dino Patti has never been lost in a forest.

We experienced Limbo with a set of noise-cancelling cans over the ears to combat the cacophony of the E3 show-floor, but it added an incredible ambience to the tranquil gaming experience. There is no sound track to the game, only minimalist effects that serve as narrative queues. You are pretty much left alone to figure out your journey through the game, solving puzzles, and overcoming death; "We've become experts at annoying gamers",

Limbo is one of the most beautiful gaming experiences around... guaranteed to evoke goosebumps

added Dino with a wry smile. It sounds profound, but with a cerebral work-out like Limbo, players need to experience death in order to progress; "With Limbo, players never die in vein".

One man coded Limbo, alone in his basement: Arnt Jensen. Arnt suffers from arachnophobia, which might go a long way to explaining the big spider as a sort of boss-come-gatekeeper in Limbo. He made his way out of the basement to talk with us during E3 – look out for that interview in a future issue. There is a chilling, almost macabre undertone to Limbo in that its surprising how quickly the games peaceful, muted tones descend into violence.

Limbo confirms the assertion that games are art. For that, we salute you.

Nordic Game, Wii Sing Encore.

Thanks to the lovely Ali Wood of Premier PR, we got to chat with the game's designer, Leo Zullo. Featuring 40 songs with their original videos, a special singing lesson feature and karaoke mode for the professional singers, Wii Sing Encore is perfect summer party fodder. So grab the Pimms, leave the BBQ to cinder, and let Wii Sing Encore stir up the mojo. Just make sure you invite the neighbours.

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Sega, Super Monkey Ball 2: Sakura Edition on iPad.

Super Monkey Ball 2 offers over 100 levels of single and multiplayer gameplay as well as cool mini-games like Monkey Golf, and the iPad exclusive Monkey Base, making authentic use of the iPad's accelerometer and crisp, beautiful graphics. Packed with content, it left my head spinning, although in fairness, I only got to steal 15 minutes on it (we had a packed schedule, don't you know). The price, not so, at $12.99 on the App store.

Some critics claim Super Monkey Ball 2 is a port picked before it had time to ripen, but we thought it was sweet, and would have got a thumbs up from Mr Del Monte. Mind you, he says "Yes" to everything.

2K, Mafia II.

Having been invited with open arms into the bosom of Mafia II you can't help but be suspicious – these guys have a reputation, right? All thoughts of an ambush were immediately dispelled with the atmosphere 2K and their seasoned Mafioso development team, Illusion Software have created with the game. They have redefined authenticity with the visual pleasing representation of a dry 1950's America. The production values, even in this early stage – we played through the demo – were staggering. The dialogue is cutting and belongs in a Mafia film. This is no more evident than an exchange between Vito and friend, Joe - "Drinking on the job?", Vitto's repost - "Since when did you turn Irish?". Touché Vito. The ambient sounds provided by a complete orchestra play the heart strings and complement the tone. Even Omerta CEO, Steve Biddick - found loitering in the company of Mafia brethren - enjoyed the hands-on. His shooting proved as sharp as his tongue, taking out Fatman and obliterating the interactive environment with an MG42 heavy machine gun. 2K have raised the bar. And we got out alive. Still no signs, or smells, or a horses head under my desk. Nice, Mister Vito.

En Masse / Bluehole, TERA Online.

A richly graphical action-based MMO wielding as much expectation as the Slayer – in-game character with brute strength to carry two butchers blades. Chops, anyone? TERA was experienced fittingly within the dark confines of their booth. Respect to their MC for dragging us kicking and screaming around a snap-shot of the expansive 3D world, and instance-based combat with the gruelling NPC's. This was our unflagging MC's last TERA press tour of E3: I can only imagine the number of energy drinks he'd slugged over the 3 days.

The fast-paced combat system goes beyond the simple point-and-click of other RPG, in that you need to actively dodge, charge, and flank enemies in order to bring them down. Stumbling out of the booth into the blinking E3 lights, you couldn't help but feel the satisfaction of achievement in the co-op play. TERA will turn-heads, but not in terror, rather in admiration.

Bigpoint, Battlestar Galactica.

Bigpoint carried the momentum over from a successful GDC with private showings of Battlestar Galactica Online, an adrenaline-fuelled, space-jockeying browser-based MMO. BSG is a partnership with NBC-Universal and features the technology of the scalable Unity 3D engine. Pick between the human and Cylon races and engage in tactical space combat, mission-based quests, and endless exploration. Spunky femme fatales Cylon captains are welcome, but it remains to be seen.

BBMMO Battlestar Galactica and BBMMO Star Trek... Oh you are spoiling us!

Bigpoint are built on the cornerstones of creating an experience that can be enjoyed by anyone, anywhere, and they consider BSG as their most ambitious project to date. So it could defile or define. Either way, expect a story-driven experience that will be executed with the highest discernible quality. Bigpoint threw a great party too during E3. But we'd like to make it clear the positive spin above was not bought in any way by free drinks and dancing girls. No sir.

Gameforge, Star Trek.

It would appear that TV tie-ins are in vogue. So fittingly, we stole some time with one of the other pillars of the German browser-based behemoths; Gameforge. They announced a browser-based and Facebook outing for Star Trek – a partnership with US broadcasting powerhouse, CBS. For Gameforge, the Star Trek license is part of a bold journey into "global AAA expansion". The browser-based title will be based on the classic Star Trek series, whereas the Facebook, or social game, takes inspiration from the contemporary Deep Space Nine. Expect to hear more from our very own Drunkengamer in a future issue.

Title: Omerta

Format: Browser-Based

DrunkenGamer Hijacks Omerta

By DrunkenGamer

One thing I have learnt over the last few months of design is that balance is key. For example, the randomisation of the smuggling values that I talked about in last months column. The balance there was making the increase in value worth the players effort to change routes, while at the same time not adversely effecting the overall economy of the game.

Now before I stepped up to design itself, I would just regularly assume that the designs being passed to me had taken that into account. However, I recently decided to take a look back over some of the design choices that had been made, and while most were fine, I did manage to find a flaw or two.

The biggest of which has been a bone of contention between the crew and the players since it was done - the removal of Killing Skill from the game.

To explain what it was for those who don't know, basically as the user progressed up the ranks of Omerta for strength, they also had the option to train their killing ability by shooting at bottles or each other.

This skill was then used as part of the killing calculations and several other calculations throughout the game.

"But that sounds simple!", I hear you cry, so why was it removed? Well quite frankly the whole system was flawed, not from the players perspective but in the back-end of the system. It was used as part of calculations that it shouldn't be, missing in things that should have used it and all round had become a nightmare to work with.

From a design point of view it was a failure, so much so that the only option available to us was its removal. So that's what we did.

It's here that the flaw occurs. When we took away the killing skill all the calculations were naturally fixed and the back-end handled, however we forgot one aspect of the balance - the player's side of things!

For them, when we took away killing skill, we took away more than a mere statistic on their account and an option on the crimes page. Without realising it we had also taken away a personal goal for the player. Most importantly, as the majority of their killing skill came from shooting other players, we had broken the risk/reward balance of killing.

When you make a kill attempt in Omerta, you are effectively putting your account on the line because of the ability for the enemy to shoot back. When they got rewarded with killing skill, there was a reason to risk your account - if you survived, your account was stronger for the attempt. Without Killing Skill, this was no longer true.

So the first thing I felt I had to do was return the reward for killing. Yet putting Killing Skill back would just take far too long when it comes to fixing all the issues that resulted in its removal in the first place.

So I looked at what would provide a sense of personal progression again, and the natural choice? - Rank Points.

So now, when a user risks their account, they get a reward again in the form of up to a 3% increase in rank. There is a discussion on Deathmatch, as always, about if this is enough to redress the balance or if there is still more that needs to be done. Why not come over and let us know your opinion?

Eye Witness

By Enigmatic

The ever unpredictable world of Omerta has once again lived up to it's name and fame. With loud gunfire lighting up both the international and Deathmatch versions.

On .com (the international version) everything started with a clean-up action by some of the bigger families, which backfired royally when the intended victims got wind of it and struck first. The Bravada and Profetene families put up a nice fight but were eventually outgunned by their opposition.

With the wheels of war set in motion, Kerberos, Notte and Caliente carried on with the planned attack on Obscura, and the next day the Gunners family was gunned down by Vincitori & Untouchables, as was planned before they were attacked.

Deathmatch couldn't stay behind and turned into a real slaughterhouse several times, with a couple of big wars fought out. Since it wasn't always clear to see who was dying and who survived; the confusion itself sparked even more conflicts, making it enjoyable for all of the involved families and the players that were watching the fireworks display.

It all began when the Red Cross organisation was violently blown away. Just a couple of days later it came to a show of strength between the perennial powerhouse Jamesons family, and the up-and-coming mastodont, Silhouette.

As bloods on both sides joined in, it turned into a bloody mess with some of the top accounts falling as well. When the dust finally settled it took some days for all the families to reorganise and check the newly laid battle-lines.

A week later the Jamesons family was tested again by a collective of families. Helped by a quick response from their bloods, they repelled the attack and are now able to take up some rest to restock and clean their guns after a tiresome month of shooting.

A couple of days later IDC, after seeing the results of the previous war, decided to take out some of the competition while they were wounded, gaining themselves more territory and becoming one of the mayor players in the version's struggle for power.
All these evolutions really make a promise for more interesting battles in the weeks to come.

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1 2 3 4 5 6

Count Down OF

Badass Boss Fights

The biggest, baddest, bestest, boss-battles bar none!

This is what it's about

Intro

The Boss Fight is probably the most fundamental staple in videogames. You always know when they're coming, there are many tell-tale signs. In the retro days it was obvious: anything from the music stopping suddenly or a suspiciously surplus amount of ammo and health items. As the industry moved forward it got easier to tell whether a fight was imminent; a convenient save spot just before you enter a new area or even the game's narrative would suggest some sort of boss fight will ensue. However, now that videogames are outstanding feats of technology and a lot of triple-A titles favour more realistic settings and characters, boss fights seem to be dying out, instead replaced with set-pieces or a horde of enemies (Modern Warfare 2, BioShock 2, Splinter Cell: Conviction). So in honour to all the Big Bosses out there – excluding Naked Snake – we're presenting you with a list of our favourite Badass Boss Fights:

Twelve

Sapientia, Controller of Seas from Bayonetta

Bayonetta is a game that must be played by all who claim to be hardcore gamers. Platinum Game's ridiculous action game has been out for a while now and it has some of the most outrageous boss fights in terms of scale, action, and visual satisfaction, the greatest we think being Sapientia, Controller of Seas. This is a mechanical leg-faced-chinned-face-laser-shooting dragon/lizard thing, that description should be enough to convince you to get this game. He has fearsome jaws that try to chomp you from the beneath the ocean's surface – thrilling and frightening stuff.

Thirteen

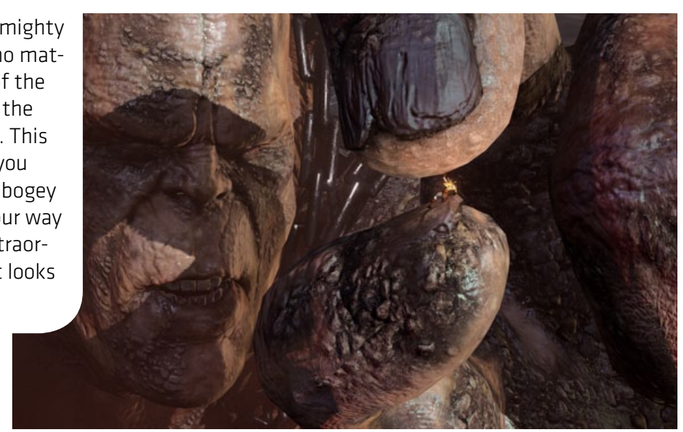
The Great Mighty Poo from Conker's Bad Fur Day

A big singing piece of shit - can a boss get any more disgusting then that? We think not. Conker's Bad Fur Day was one of the N64's last triumphs. It's a game that says, "Fuck you kids, this game's for the grown-ups." It's non-stop unadulterated nonsense and we loved it - The Great Mighty Poo being one of the many reasons why. This Sloprano sings to Conker while trying to hit him with pieces of excrement. How do you beat this enormous pile of turd? With toilet-roll of course.

Eleven

Cronus from God of War III

They don't get much bigger than Cronus, the mighty titan that would never fit on your HD screen no matter how big it is. This castrating giant is one of the greatest looking boss fights we've ever seen, the PlayStation 3 clearly showcasing its potential. This boss is so huge his body becomes the arena, you have to dodge his attempts to flick you like a bogey from the end of his finger. But as you work your way around his body you'll manage to do some extraordinary damage, like removing a finger nail – it looks better than it sounds!



Ten

Shredder TMNT IV: Turtles in Time

Shredder is one the best character designs ever. Just look at him, his helmet's badass, his cape's badass, his armour's badass, and so on. For this to be the archenemies of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is outstanding, especially since there's no chance of a modern children's cartoon featuring an antagonist like this. In Turtles in Time, beating Shredder was no easy feat, especially in the original arcade game. He had an array of special attacks, and if they hit your Turtle he wasn't getting up.

Nine

The Alien's Lair from Contra

Contra wasn't a particularly easy game. Even with the Konami code and the 30 lives it gave, many people still submitted to its constant barrage of defeat. Some people we know haven't even played Contra - if you're one of them and you're reading this: go away and play this game (XBLA). For those that did complete Contra – congratulations – you would have witnessed the final stage, The Alien's Lair. Xenomorphic aliens attack you from all angles, and the Final Boss keeps spawning more out to stop you from winning. And after you've beaten the level, you'll be able to say you're part of an exclusive club – I beat Contra!

Eight

Mr. Burns from The Simpson's Arcade

Mr. Burns is an all-time badass. Despite his weakly body and dementia, Mr. Burns has the making of a true evil genius, with his goal in life being money, power, and finding ways to acquire more money and power. Now The Simpson's haven't had great success in the videogame industry, however the arcade game made by Konami was an exception and the final boss battle, with the aforementioned Mr. Burns, was a memorable experience. Donning some sort of battle armour, Mr. Burns will stop at nothing from beating your character to a yellow pulp.

Seven

Wesker from Resident Evil 5

Until Resident Evil: Code Veronica many people thought Wesker was dead – hoisted by his own petard in the original game when the Tyrant ended him. However, he was down but not out. After some wicked augmentation, Wesker became a cat-eyed speed demon, but it wasn't until Resident Evil 5 that we finally got to have a crack at him. The boss fight with Wesker in the hanger isn't particularly difficult once you work out the strategy, but it was a breath of fresh air compared to the just-keep-shooting tactics we've seen in many games before and after it.

Six

The Third Colossus from Shadow of the Colossus

This game was such a technological achievement for the PlayStation 2 we'd go as far as saying it's the best game ever to appear on the last generation console. Its simplicity led to its success; the gameplay wasn't overly complicated, the setting and story were easy to follow, and the boss fights were spectacular. Our favourite has to be with the looming Third Colossus, who you fight against on an open plane. If you haven't played this game yet, we urge you to find time to do so - it's amazing!

Five

The Final Confrontation in the MegaDrive's Terminator

It seems that the Sega MegaDrive was the only console of its time to have a decent Terminator game. The Nintendo versions sucked, yet the Sega kicked ass, being a true homage to the first movie, especially during the final level. During this stage the terminator is chasing you through a factory, and it's up to you to lure him to his death in the crushing mechanism. It'll chase you from the get-go, and if you do manage to shake him, he'll magically teleport in front of you! An awesome finish to an awesome game – the music's great too.

Four

The End from Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

We don't know if you've noticed, but we have. There's been a great deal of games made by Konami featuring on this list, MGS3 being the final one. It was difficult to select just one boss from the MGS series. If we wanted we probably could have had the list filled with Foxhound, Cobra Unit, and Dead Cell, but we decided against it, doing our best to pick just one. We selected The End, his battle consisting of an epic game of cat-and-mouse with sniper rifles across three maps. This fight can take up to two hours to finish! There's a few sneaky ways of skipping this fight, but why would you? It's amazing.

Three

Scarecrow from Batman: Arkham Asylum

A lot of gamers – us included – wasn't expecting a lot from the boss fights in Rocksteady's Batman: AA. Nobody would have disagreed with claims that the boss fights would just be Batman punching his deadliest villains, because a lot of them were. However, the boss fights with Scarecrow were pure gold. As soon as he appears in the game things start to lose sense: doors lead back into the same rooms; it rains inside; and major characters die in front of your eyes. Three times this guy tries to mind-fuck you, the ultimate weapon against engrossed gamers.

Two

Dr Robotnik from Sonic the Hedgehog

Egg-shaped Dr Robotnik is your classic videogame boss. He's as persistent as they come and will do everything he can to make Sonic road kill, going as far as making a new invention to try out every time – even a Mean Bean Machine. For us the most epic battle with Eggman was the initial one, because it was the first time we heard his music, and because he tried to squash Sonic with a giant wrecking-ball. Eight hits and he flies off, to return many more times.

Number One

Ezio Auditore/Altair ibn-La'Ahad from the Assassin's Creed series

Die, Führer, Die! That's the name of the final level in the original Wolfenstein game, where your objective is to kill Adolf Hitler himself. That's right, you fight Hitler. HITLER! Now we know that there are other epic boss fights in this brilliant medium, but nothing can compare with fighting the most infamous man ever to have lived. Using his magic powers of teleportation – did you not know he could do that? – Hitler will mock you when you shoot at him, causing him to do an Obi-Wan Kenobi out of his robe. After dodging his Nazi fire balls – he has more than one of them apparently – Hitler changes into his suspiciously futuristic battle suit and will try to mow down your American ass. A boss battle against Hitler, now that's badass.

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Title: Game Horizon

Format: Conference

GAMEHORIZON CONFERENCE

By TurkeySaladBoy

GameHorizon conference review.

I wonder if event organisers get much sleep. I mean, even if the subject matter is compelling, and there is the lure of a free bar, getting people to attend is a lottery – although the free bar probably helps. Our close friends at GameHorizon probably sleep on goose feathers, since they have carved out a growing niche with their annual conference that pulls in an international audience. The 2010 GameHorizon conference was no exception. It ticked all the boxes: engaging speakers, invaluable industry insight, and networking with like-minded others, all against the backdrop of inspiring architecture. We address the highlights, not in any particular order mind, and recall the moments when our hearts skipped a beat with excitement at what the future of gaming has in store.

Big expectation is always piled of the shoulders of a keynote speaker. Will he, wont he? Jesse Schell captivated from the word go. His satirical look at how advances in technology have made

Game Horizon 2010 ticked all the boxes; engaging speakers, industry insight and booze.

life a game were supported by playful visuals that mapped the journey towards Gamepocalypse. To Schell, games have crept out of the screen and penetrated everywhere.

Schell is fascinated with Facebook, "you can play at work and the boss wont notice. Doesn't work with Halo though" and the psychology of the microtransaction. But Schell observed how our data is cunningly being used as a mechanic to incentivise us.. to buy more stuff. Retail is a gold-mine according to Schell, in that its sat on layers of statistics. It's working in cahoots with the very social networks and games that we play, citing Zynga branded drinks cups in 7/11.
The Mad Men of 1960's TV advertising grew rapidly and force-fed America's materialism with stuff they didn't really need. Nickelodeon, for instance, has been burning messages into the brain for years. But its not all doom and gloom with Schell. There is scope to create credible gaming experiences that will enhance our lives. Of course, its about balance. Or for Schell, knowing when to stop.
The question remains though: do we really want our whole life tracked, and to be a game? I brush my teeth, but out of necessity, not to score points. Geo-caching and Foursquare have become popular social activities. Why? Because we love to share. Schell wasn't convinced of Wikipedia, however, the unstoppable force is the desire of people to share.

We follow Nils Holger-Henning, COO of Bigpoint around the conference circuit like a bad smell. His advocacy of browser-based games, and the spoils to be had, do grab the attention, especially when he opens with headline statistics: current value of online gaming is $12 billion, and is estimated to be worth $20 billion in 2013.
We respect Nil's honest approach to business; "What is the lifetime of an MMO? Honestly, no one knows. But if the community grows, we add new content". Nils attributed the stickiness of social MMOs to that of our human relationships; "You don't skip your friends".

Success at Bigpoing comes with the flexibility offered by microtransactions. The Simple equation: demand + price, enables Bigpoint to generate a higher ARPPU than World of Warcraft. Nils recalled that Astrum Online – a competitor in the online gaming space – sell at least two pieces of digital armour, a line in a database, with a value of $50,000 every calendar month. For Nils, fixed prices don't work. And if the high-rollers want to spend, let them do it.
Nils pointed to the success achieved by other online games in new markets. Take browser-based strategy game, Travian. Its become a success in Arabic countries by getting the basics right: serving up text from right to left; offering local payment solutions; and adapting the content to the culture.

Bigpoint.com has become one of the number one online gaming destinations, with 128,000,000 registered accounts, more than the daily number of eggs consumed around the World. Expansion is part of their strategy - they have a target of 100 new games on the portal before the end of 2010 – as well as partnerships with IP holders in other verticals. Nils presented a teaser trailer for Battlestar Galatic Online, and made reference to The Mummy Online – with creative input from Jesse Schell. "But why go down the licensing route?"

Big point has more registered accounts than there are eggs eaten around the world each day. Fact.

asked a puzzled Ian Livingstone, Life President of Eidos and conference chair; "To crack the US market, since they prefer action-driven games".

Nicholas 'Mr Finance' Lovell chaired a panel debated: free versus paid, with two teams sparring over the best business model to generate money from a game. Championing free where Ian Baverstock (Consultant, and ex-President of UK development group, Kuju) and Dylan Collins (Jolt Online); versus Mark 'Epic' Rein (Epic Games); and James Brooksby (Double Six).
Mark Rein pointed out, "AAA quality is available everywhere, but it costs. There is no such thing as a free lunch, as somebody, somewhere is paying in some way". This was countered by a jab from Ian Baverstock; "Start with a price-point of zero, and you will reach a huge audience". Support came from colleague Dylan Collins, "Keep ROI in mind. There are 1 billion browsers out there in the world. Browser games present low barriers to entry from production, through to consumption". Amen, Dylan. And the latest research indicates that free-to-play gaming on a PC is not cannibalising sales of console games.
A sigh of relief was breathed when Mark Rein acknowledged, "people will pay for quality. 50% of US audiences paid to watch movies in 3D (and its the same movie, but you wear those dorky glasses)". His colleague James

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"Female characters have to have massive..."

After simulating sex with a pen and the gaps in his fingers, he started to doubt his career choice...

Brooksby, cheerleading 'paid', made an intriguing observation, "We're giving consumers too much free content in the form of a demo. If you're confident of the games quality, use the demo later to achieve the long-tail". Whilst that's OK, how do the smaller indies get heard?

Ian Baverstock took a well thought out swipe with, "Will generation Y embrace the cost of console hardware and £40 price point of a new title? Why should they, when they have been brought up with free content on the web. The web has radicalised consumption".
The indies in the audience where whooping and hollowing to Ian Baverstock's war cry, "The landscape is changing. The little guy locking horns with the big publisher are on the same playing field. So its a great time to be a new entrant". Hurrah indeed! Mark Rein attempted to dampen the mood with, "Marketing counts for a lot. You still need to reach an audience, and TV ads still make a difference". The panel rumbled like a volcano before coming to the meaningful conclusion: there is scope for both freemium and paid-for business models. I'm pleased that's cleared up.

Joseth Olin, like 'Great' Scott Foe, possesses inspirational qualities, and both are nice people to boot. Olin is President of AISA – Academy of Arts and Sciences, Foe is a game designer genius and master of dead-pan. Olin shared bewitching statistics and moderated reasons to be cheerful about the future of gaming. For instance, there are 6 million new gamers in the USA, a 25% increase since 2008. Who plays games? "The Glastonbury crowd. That's your marketplace". As for the definitions, is the core really core? It echo's a point made by Jesse Schell - have your concept define the audience. Avoid complacency though ,warns Olin, "TV viewers are actually up 6% in USA. The average teen spends 135 hours per month watching TV". Take heart though, as there is plenty of wallet to go after. In the US, consumers purchase buckets of minutes to fill their entertainment needs, like with Tivo and Netflix.

There are 6 million new gamers in the USA, a rise of 25% since 2008. There's a reason to be cheerful

For Olin, OnLive is an attractive option but time will tell, "although its interface has its appeal" - Schell referred to OnLive as, "wine in a box". So look to the platforms where this model applies. Take the Intel Netbook with an install base of 30 million in the US. Its the #1 entertainment device. The barriers to entry are lower, but of course, like the other platforms – notably the iPhone – the inherent challenges are in standing out.

Olin criticised the industry for inventing games to meta-cise our investment, but consumers don't think that way. They look for quality experiences. Respect your audience, do your research, and you will get results. He signed off with the mantra of the 22nd century: "Have screen, will game".

Foe reminded the industry that our 'virtuosos', like Don Baglow – pioneer of the first graphical MMO - will handle the continuing change in the market, "When we have these talented and experienced people, the future is a bright thing". He directed questions from those hungry to break into the industry to the Mod community. "Download the engines and the tools; they are out there. Experiment, play and show off your skills. Fill your resume accordingly".

Michael Acton-Smith, CEO of Mind Candy, is a stealth entrepreneur. He set up and sold Firebox.com, and his latest project is children's virtual world Moshi Monsters, with customisation at its core. Moshi Monsters is free to sign-up and play. Players solve puzzles, earn in-game currency; rocks, and unlock new items. Although in his own words, business has not always been champagne and canapés: "Failure is a learning process. Investors in the UK should embrace this concept". Perplex City, a high-risk VC-funded alternate reality game (ARG) didn't exactly light the blue-touch paper, but Acton-Smith has a drive and is willing to learn from mistakes. With the last of the VC money they created what would turn into Moshi Monsters.

Business has not always been champagne and canapés... Failure is a learning process.

Freemium proved to be one of the conference buzzwords. Whilst many build in the hope people will come, Acton-Smith, "worked out the 'ium' of the business model" with Moshi Monsters. Registrations rocketed following the decision to open the virtual world up for free. The challenge was then in the conversion to paying players. This was counted by slicing up the content into packages offering increased value. Subtle queues were applied to how the packages were merchandised, with 12 months subscriptions priced at £29.95 referred to as, "Best Package" and displayed in green. This pricing structure appealed to the human psychology; "We have a need for context in order to determine value".
New entrants to the MMO space could do worse than study Moshi Monsters. Its currently attracting 2 million registrations a month. That's equal to a new player every 2 seconds. The freemium model is working to great effect with an extraordinary conversation rate of 8-9 days for every free registration to paid-up subscriber. Whilst those numbers will please any CFO and VC, consider the impact on content creation. Acton-Smith

points out, "children cycle every 2-3 months, so make the content sticky. After all, players invest a lot of time, energy and (their parents) money". Action-Smith and colleagues at Mind Candy put a razor sharp focus on A-B testing and data mining – like the social gaming behemoths; Zynga, Playfish, Playdom, etc.. - to make sure their community continue to customise their little hearts out. When kids fall in love, they want it now! Judging by the incredible numbers, they want colourful little Moshi's.

Yohei Ishii of CCP Games whipped the audience into a frenzy with details of console-based – yes, you read that correct – FPS, Dust 514. Ishii acknowledged the traditional console publishing model is broken. As a result, CCP have adopted a games-as-service approach for their FPS. Expect microtransactions and an achievement system that blows anything currently on XBLA out of the water. Put infamy in your pipe and smoke it. CCP have the luxury of an established community - 340k

Seb Hayes has gone on to build a social network for gamers... He is convinced Playfire will succeed

subscribers of space-trading cash-cow, EVE Online – to present Dust 514. And with four studios around the World, including Gateshead - doors now open - they have the expertise to make the FPS a success.

We didn't get to hear Peter Molyneux. Although we did find this picture on the web and it made us laugh:

In the same vein, the pint-sized master statistician, Rick Gibson was all data, data, data. Yeah, well take a look at the numbers on this:

If Schell, Olin and Foe were the hearty main course, Charles Cecil was the cheese and biscuits, with his playful comparison of the entrepreneurial 18th century painter, William Hogarth, with modern-day game developers.

The 18th century was an epoch of disruption. Hogarth broke the rules and found new distribution models for his paintings, selling direct to the consumer. Hogarth's paintings slipped, but he was brazen in his reasoning, "When its ready". The Housers – circa, Dan and Sam, founders of Rockstar - must have a Hogarth or 7 hanging in their mansions. Hogarth, as a true innovator and manipulator, forced parliament to change the copyright laws. Indeed, in 1739, legislation was passed to protect his own interests. UK lobby group Tiga should take note.

Seb Hayes is a media innovator. After creating a Playstation 3 forum years ahead of his, and the consoles time, he went on to build a social network for gamers: Playfire.com. Its a place to hang out and meet with like-minded gamers. Seb is facing stiff competition from the likes of GamerDNA and Raptr, but he, and his VC-funders, are convinced Playfire will burn the souls of gamers worldwide.

Tom Rothenberg is the modern day Donald Draper. He was electric personified on the stage using phrases like, "Don't talk at, talk with", "Where is your audience?", and "A story is better than an idea". Whilst we're being playful, lets not forget Rothenberg's thinking was behind launch campaigns for Gears of War and Halo 3. So he deserves his buzzword bingo medal. Rothenberg acknowledged the shift over to social media and the importance of tracking how people are interacting with your brand; "We're in the 4th age of advertising, the dialogue era. We care if your brand has X amount of 'Likes' on Facebook". Google analytics is a cost-effective tool. PepsiCo, with their warchest, have assembled a mission control centre where they monitor the buzz about brands like Gatorade through high-tech visualization tools and techniques. Sure, the games industry is booming and content is flooding channels, but how do you stand out? Rothenberg cited fascinating case studies: Umbro football shirts; Gatorade energy drink and Bavaria beer – poor Robbie Earl – where all had one underlying theme: a good story, which was then massaged accordingly.

Viral marketing is more alive than ever. Create content that can be customised and more people will pass it on.

Viral marketing is more alive than ever. So create content that can be customised as people will be more inclined to pass the message on. Of course recommendations from friends are infinitely more valuable. Amen.

Motivational speaker Mark Schulman was a highlight. He's a session drummer that has played with the likes of Billy Idol, Cher, Simple Minds, and more recently, P!NK. He shared his engaging story – overcoming cancer with a decadence that commanded respect and admiration. Schulman is a powerful performer with an awesome stage presence. Two outstanding sound bytes that are still ringing in the ear – as well as his playing: "Attitude is powerful" and, "All we have in life is a series of nows". So go seize them. He recommended a drinking game, BAG: bragging, aspiration and gratitude. Mark's call to action; go play this game without drink. You'll be surprised of the results, and it will bond your team together.

Darren Jobling of Eutechnyx is one of the old-guard. However, his business acumen and drive to keep his company ahead keep him young at heart. He

"If he kicks my chair one more time, I'm going Lara on his ass"

shared some of these tricks which, in essence, are based on common sense. However, they can easily go unnoticed in this busy, on-demand world.
Its a cliché perhaps, but if you don't know your audience, then your beautiful creation will tank. Inspire your audience with carrot juice, adopted by captains on board ships in the Master and Commander era. It worked. A surprising observation was, "Recruit untrainable people". That is, look for those not necessarily from the traditional games sector, or even players, and train them accordingly. If you get it right, and harness their raw talent, energy, drive, the right attitude and integrity, great things will happen.
Darren teased us with tid-bits about their foray into the MMO space with Auto Club Revolution. Darren described it as being, "at the intersection of Farmville and Kart Rider", a popular Korean MMO. Auto Club Revolution will blend competitive racing, customisation – fuelled by microtransactions - and a shared love of car culture.

Waiting

That's another thrilling GameHorizon conference gone, the talks were inspiring, the people insightful and the beer plentiful. We hope to see you all at the next one.

We left the GameHorizon conference with our heads spinning in anticipation, or thanks to Jesse Schell, in consternation, of where the industry is heading. The consensus is that connectivity will be at its core, unavoidable even, and our innate desire to show and tell will drive the mechanics of the future. The key question remains: just where will the next generation find the time to dedicate to all the exciting content being offered? Mind you, they are born with the ability to multi-task; grinding in World of Warcraft, instant messaging on Facebook, taking a video call with their girl-friend while texting their mum a request to borrow money, and playing the solo from Hotel California on a double-headed Rockband guitar. Yeah, they'll be fine.

If you don't know your audience, then your beautiful creation will tank. Inspire your audience with carrot juice.

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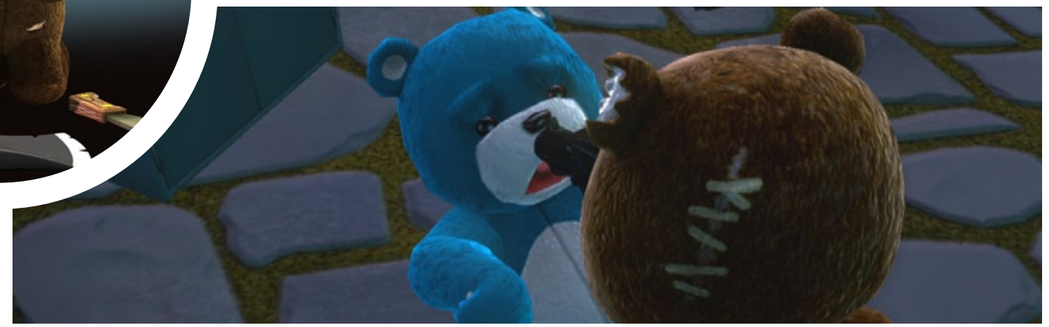
Title: Naughty Bear

Format: PS3, X360



Naughty Bear

By Dan (Ed)

If you go down to the woods today, be ready to have gouged eyes, these naughty bears will kick your ass, and that will be your demise. This little bear from A2M, is sure to enjoy killing men, a teddy bear is having a sadistic piiicniiiic...

Who can resist writing a bit of original music about a game that's based on a masochistic, killing machine of a Teddy Bear hell-bent on gorey revenge? Not us, that's for sure.
Naughty Bear, A2M's latest release, has you take on the role of the game's title character, "Naughty Bear", a teddy bear who's the butt of all jokes on the insanely cutesy Perfection Island. But the other bears have just played one trick too many, leaving him out of Daddles party and mocking his attempt at making friends by bringing a present. He spent so long working on that present too...
Time for some furry vengeance – teddy bear style!

To be honest, the whole problem facing Naughty Bear is that the concept was just so damn marketable from the off.
Eagerly waiting gamers have been battered with funny-as-hell videos for months, using Naughty Bear's concept and characters to create some genuinely awesome parodies of top horror movie franchises, building the game up to be an R-rated take on a nursery rhyme that every kid loves to learn. It was beginning to look like The Path for next-gen consoles, a Tim Burton Alice in Wonderland for the gamepad inclined. It's a concept that should be easy to nail gamplay wise, but sadly, that's not the case.

The blood and gore in this Manhunt-style adventure have been replaced by flying fur.

It was one of the biggest disappointments of the year to see this review copy land on our desk with a 12-rated certificate. A..12? How can that be? Did the developers not see the trailers for their own game or something?
It was also a big surprise to have it drop on our desk at all. It had that "downloadable title" vibe written all over it, even though it was never actually announced as such.

In fairness, the 12-rated certification surprise still rings true. Despite the blood and gore of this Manhunt-style adventure being replaced by flying fur, this is still a game that encourages the devil on your shoulder to stand up and be counted. You'll be battering a poor bear's very psychological make-up to a suicidal mess, revelling in your own sense of self-satisfaction as you drive a victim to the point

of blowing the stitching off their heads. A 15 certificate would have probably been a better shout. If A2M thought outside of the jack-in-a-box and replaced the fur with blood – which would have been a really cool effect – an 18 wouldn't have been argued by many. Unfortunately, the downloadable-title vibe also rings true, as Naughty Bear only really manages to offer the same limited gameplay choices over a handful of overly used environments, offering little in the way of variety for it's 30+ stages. There's plenty of teddy bear-on-bear violence to be had, and that might be exactly what you came to see, but it's not enough to justify a full retail release on it's own.

Each stage has you stalking your prey in a bid to terrify and ultimately kill them off, combining stealth and violence with a bit of required forward thinking. You earn Naughty Points for your deviant acts, contributing to a total score that's uploaded onto online leaderboards for the world to see and beat. Keep up the inventiveness with your violence and you'll

rack up a healthy multiplier, awarding more points to unlock new levels and costumes, which can influence Naughty's stats and abilities. There is only really one level to speak of, broken up into different areas, and it gets unfortunately old – fast. This killing playground allows you to sneak around in wooded areas, set traps for unwitting bears, jump out to scare the living daylights out of them with a massive "boo", and generally torment victims to the point of suicide.
For example, you could just run up to a bear and attack them using the game's somewhat dated fighting mechanic, consisting of punch and dodge, but you'd be much better off sneaking up to his window and shouting boo, lighting the outside BBQ to confuse him, then sneaking up behind him while he's checking it out and ramming his face onto the grill. It's undeniably fun to do for a couple of hours, but after this time you'll start to feel like you've already done it all, thanks to the limited selection of environments and exact same environmental kills being on offer every stage you play.

There are some cool gameplay elements to consider while you're torturing your victims. Do you let them escape the island and call for back up, resulting in more bears arriving to try and catch you and become unwitting victims to toy with, or do simply torment the bears you're provided with to the best of your abilities?
Things are made a bit more interesting by various different types of challenges per stage, but they all boil down to the same ultimate goal – kill everything in sight. These challenges range from having to stay invisible for the whole stage – accomplished at any time by standing in the woods - needing to drive every bear to the point of insanity before execution, or been insanely quick about your actions.

Jelly

Jelly... the most offensive and vile weapon known to bear kind. Seriously, it get's stuck in their fur!

The most entertainment is to be had in making bears commit suicide.

Bad Luck

It's bad luck to open an umbrella inside... considering where he's going to put that, I wouldnt worry.

The most entertainment is to be had in making bears commit suicide, scaring them to the point of thinking the only way out is to take a gun to their head or stab themselves. There's just something devilishly satisfying about watching a cute bear take it's own life... Credit has to go to the AI of the various character types, who each react differently to given situations. One type of bear might run and lock themselves in their house at the first sniff of trouble, while another will grab the nearest weapon and come out looking for you. Understanding how each character type acts will result in you been able to plan your moves more efficiently, resulting in a higher rake of Naughty Points for the end of the stage.

The graphical direction is pretty standard, best described as the kind of quality you would expect from a downloadable title.

Textures and environments on display won't be winning any awards, but they do succeed in creating an aurora similar to that in classic children's books.
There are seven "episodes" to play through, each offering a different humorous narrative and ultimate target to kill. Some of them even come with a new type of enemy to tackle, such as Zombie Bears, but their game-changing influence is minimal, and it's still just the same environments that you've already played on, with the same kills you've done many times before.
There is a strangely psychotic narrator directing the action, sounding like a mix between a children's TV presenter and that weird looking guy down the street who lets the neighbours kids play on the swing-set in his back garden, despite having no offspring of his own.

The game is unforgivably bundled with some console-resetting bugs, and the multiplayer results in a lot of disconnections. If you do get a decent online game going you'll find 4 modes to play, including: Assault, a standard deathmatch; Cakewalk, which is a capture-the-flag type mode; Golden Oozy, where you battle for a powerful weapon; and Jelly Walk, which has you trying to collect jellies faster than the others. These premises are probably the most kid-friendly part of the game, but the combat doesn't lend itself well to the online realm. You'll likely just end up mashing buttons at each other until one wins.

Keep it away from young children, what PEGI was thinking we don't know...

Naughty Bear is ultimately a let-down and a victim of it's own marketing success. Proof that an astounding concept doesn't always mean a good game is going to come of it. There are some decent parts to the affair, including the premise itself, but if it hadn't promised to be the teddy equivalent of our favourite horror stories, or was a downloadable title rather than a full retail release, it could have probably earned itself a few extra points.
Instead, this is one that you should just rent for a day, or at least wait until the price drops by a considerable margin.
We'd also recommend you keep it away from younger children. What PEGI was thinking there we don't know..

Title: Blacklight: Tango Down

Format: PC, PS3, X360

Blacklight: Tango Down

By Gow

For a first-person shooter to succeed and keep the masses playing indefinitely, it's usually got to be a top class title. Most of them come from the big dogs: Bungie, Infinity Ward, Valve... but now Zombie Studios have set out the buck the trend with their digital-download only title, Blacklight: Tango Down.
For a meagre 1200 MS points, you can get to grips with millions of different load-outs across an assortment of different classes and show the world who's the daddy over 12 maps and 7 game modes.

Blacklight: Tango Down plays like nothing else available on the market, it's a mash of frantic old-school gameplay with a touch of modern tactical warfare. It's a unique concept that offers a whole new style of gameplay. The fast pace encourages twitch gameplay, shooting from the hip with the fastest firing gun you can find, yet it's touted as a tactical shooter. While FPS titles like COD are praised for their online play, they do have major flaws, and anyone who's taken on a sniper online will know how popular the no-scoping approach becomes. To combat this it seems that no scoping has an effect on more than just your accuracy. Standing 2ft away and squeezing out a round from a sniper rifle without scoping (standard practice at close range) will often leave you stood puzzled, wondering where that round actually went... from 2ft, it would be pretty hard to miss, and you see a reaction from the enemy so you assume he's hit, but why isn't he dead?
There are a few inconsistencies in the weapons. Snipers seem to struggle with their low rate of fire and being a bit tame, and you can often be out gunned by an SMG at range. There are benefits to each gun and they can be exploited, but it feels that the fast-firing SMG is just too accurate at distance and too inaccurate firing at close range. Choosing between the assault rifle and the SMG is like choosing whether to paint your wall eggshell or off-white; to notice, you'd have to be the wonderfully irritating female enemy, or WIFE for short.

Blacklight: Tango Down's old school frantic gameplay plays like nothing else on the market.

Despite it's drawbacks, when things are going well it can be great fun to play and the fast-paced gameplay takes you back to a simpler time when games weren't all based on real-life events. The general speed of movement can only be described as "bloody hell, what was that?!", while hitting sprint just takes it to a whole new level, allowing you to traverse a map faster than Usain Bolt with a battery up his ass.

The strange twist is the addition of tactical elements. Scoping slows your movement to a crawl, leaving you at the mercy of your enemies. It's contradictory to the usual fast pace of the game and does place an element of doubt in your mind as to whether you should spray and pray or try aiming for the forehead.

The developers, Zombie Studios, tout the game as having millions of different loadout combinations to choose from, and like most modern shooters you can pre-configure a few defaults before you enter the game.
It's definitely recommended you do that, as the sheer number of options are staggering - the match would be over by the time you set up your kits if you do them all in-game. Unfortunately, if you rule out the hundred or so weapon tags, there's little on offer that other shooters don't give you; excluding the tags, the game has a lot less options than, say, the Call of Duty series.
Although you have different classes, each class only has a single gun, so there's an SMG gun, an assault gun, a sniper, a shotgun and an LMG. Because you've only got 5 guns to customise, it makes the "millions of combinations" statement feel a little cheap, the disappointment can only be rivalled by that of a funfair when you see all the huge prizes and yet you win a goldfish. Despite it being slightly misleading, there really are a lot of combinations. Each gun can have a choice of scopes, muzzles, magazines and stocks as well as the ability to customise its camouflage and add a weapon tag.
Weapon tags add an element of style to your gun, allowing you to dangle a little charm down the side, similar to those stupid things that teenagers put on their mobile phones. These tags add a slight modification to your gun, maybe allowing you to run quicker or cause more damage; they add a nice extra level of customisation, but seem to do little to your overall loadout.

Oxymoronically (may have just made that word up), the game's best feature is also

Simon Says

The only game around where you play Simon Says to capture control points...

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the cause of most of its problems. The HRV (Hyper Reality Visor) allows you to see roughly where the enemy are in the distance and exactly where they are when they're up close. This allows you to hunt that elusive camping sniper, or check the route ahead to see if it's clear. Unfortunately, because every class has this item at it's disposal, you can throw away all elements of stealth. You can silence your weapon, you can move slowly, but you cannot escape the HRV. It's a shame because it's a great feature, which if implemented correctly could have been awesome. If it was only available to a single class, such as a scout, it could have been a great tool, but as it stands it's a bit of an annoying gimmick. The developers had clearly thought about the HRV too; implementing futuristic grenades that pixelate your screen, obscuring enemies, or better still bluescreening the HRV of anyone caught in the blast. It's a geeky, futuristic approach to smoke and flashbangs, but it shows a bit of thought put into the game.

There are limits in place to stop you from exploiting the HRV too, such as the limited amount of time it can be used and a waiting period between uses. You also cannot fire a weapon or attempt to melee while it is active, a game choice that was obviously implemented for the sake of balance over real-life gameplay.

Cover

Taking cover is massively important; venture into open space and you'll come back looking like a colander!

Turrets are placed in the spawn points to prevent the problem of spawn camping

Meh

Puny walls aren't enough to stop my mighty HRV!

The maps each have a unique feel and have been thought through, although some are lacking a bit of design and just mirror themselves. Each team starts at one end and tries to get to the other, if you know your base layout, you know theirs. Alternatively some maps offer lots of different areas that all differ from one another. It can be easy to get lost when wandering around, and you could find yourself accidentally stumbling onto an enemy spawn point and their turrets...

To prevent the age-old problem of spawn camping, Zombie Studios have placed turrets within the spawn points, which automatically shoot the enemy on-sight. While this is a great solution, the poor level design often leaves you with a single exit, so the enemy will just camp that rather than directly camping the spawn. Worse still, some maps offer cover from the turrets, just outside of the spawn points! Because of this huge oversight, a lot of games will end up as a race to each others spawn points.

While Blacklight's core gameplay is sound, it has lots of little problems that detract from the fun. It feels as though the game has been rushed to completion and the problems are reminiscent of those found in Beta releases, not a final product. The lobby system makes it near damn impossible to play against friends and you can't join a game mid way through, which often results in massively uneven teams if people drop-out during play, and for a tactical shooter there appears to be little-to-no tactics! The menu system is also a very disorientating experience, making the customisation of your weapons a little confusing.

The Singleplayer/co-op campaign allows you to get to grips with the speed of the game

The game has less of a learning curve and more of a learning cliff-face. The core game is focused around multiplayer action, but there's a singleplayer/co-op campaign thrown in, which you can use to get to grips with the speed of the game as well as the controls and weapons. You're thrown in at the deep-end with no real story or introductory process, and it's a very disorientating experience. The whole feature feels a little tacked on and is definitely there as an added benefit rather than a core experience.

For all of its quirks: the twitchy controls, the lack of communication, no party gaming, unbalanced guns, unbalanced games, unimaginative maps and an overall lack of thought, Blacklight isn't actually that bad a game – honest! It certainly ranks above the crap you find in shops for a similar price and most of the tiny little niggles could easily be fixed with a patch. Unfortunately, in it's current state, these small little problems all add up to a game that just can't compete with the big dogs. For all it's unique ideas and unique - and fairly enjoyable – gameplay, it could have rivalled some of the big budget titles, but instead it comes across as a game with a lack of focus, trying too hard to bring conflicting gameplay styles together. The HRV counteracts stealth and the speed of movement makes tactical gameplay difficult, it is a truly schizophrenic game.

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Title: Dr Who

Format: PC

Dr Who

By DrunkenGamer

There are few things in this world so iconic that, with only a partial description, people instantly know what you're talking about. Men on a zebra crossing? Very clearly the Beatles (more accurately the Abbey Road album). Use the Force? Obviously Star Wars.
With that in mind, what do you think of when I say "Blue Box" or "Sonic ScrewDriver"? The answer, without a shadow of a doubt (I hope!) would be Doctor Who!

I'll admit to having a great personal love for Doctor Who - I grew up watching the show as a small child. While I never hid behind anything, I do remember being quite worried by the sound of the monsters from time to time...
I was very annoyed when it went off air in 1989, suffering my way through the 1996 TV movie travesty (twice) to get my Dr Who fix, and couldn't have been happier when it triumphantly returned in 2005.
Since that return I have yet to miss a single episode – I was even ready to stop drinking to watch

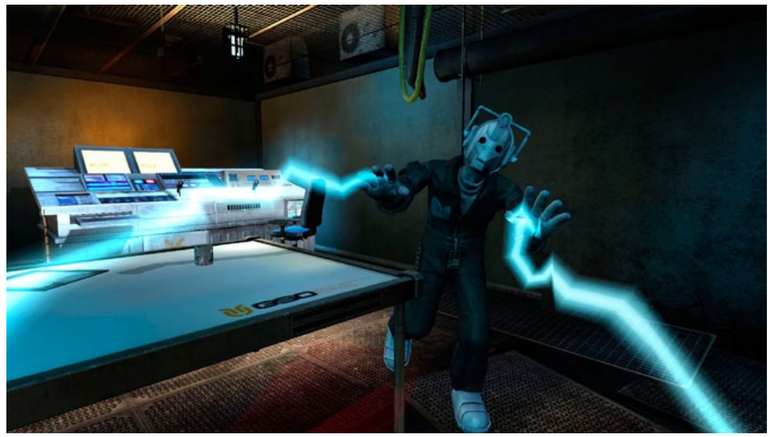
Gameplay is a simplified point and click style to make it accessible for younger players.

the first episode of the latest series, until the landlord of the pub switched the TV over to the right channel.
So with that knowledge you can imagine how I reacted when I heard that there was a Dr Who game in production. Very excited.. and expecting a lot!

Lets see how well the guys at Sumo Digital have lived up to my expectations with their episodic title, Doctor Who: The Adventure Games.

At the time of writing this, two of the four planned episodes for this game have been released, "City of the Daleks" and "Blood of the Cybermen".
In both games you take on the role of the Doctor & his current companion, Amy Pond, switching between the two as the story demands. Playing in the third-person, the core of the gameplay is very similar to all point-and-click adventures, if simplified a little to make it more accessible for the younger players.
Each of these staples, such as finding the right item to interact with in the environment or finding the right NPC to talk to at that moment, are broken up well by both interesting mini-games and some well written cut scenes.

All of the puzzles and challenges are fairly basic. For example,
In both episodes you will find yourself having to sneak past enemies. When you reach one of these 'stealth' areas the camera will do a sweep over the area to help you get a grasp of their patrol paths.



As the enemies move their cone of vision will be shown on the floor in front of them, and as long as you stay out of those zones they will pretty much ignore you. However, in a little bit of an unforgiving twist, get spotted and the buggers don't waste time in exterminating you.
One very good example of this occurs in City of the Daleks, when you are sneaking around a Dalek production line to find some spare parts. Even though I only had to sneak past two enemies and their paths are fairly simple to remember, I still found myself being killed a couple of times before I got the timing right.
Thankfully you are never sent very far back when killed, usually just back to the start of the scene.

The mini-games that appear throughout the game also have the same strange balance between fiendishly simple yet irritatingly unforgiving. The mini-game that you have to play after getting the spare parts from the production line, for example, involved moving the various components through a maze to a specific location. However, all of the walls of the maze are electrified,

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Pacman

Ever played the pacman arcade game for so long your hand cramps up? Cyberman has.

some moving, and a single touch will fry the components, resulting in you having to start again.
This is not so bad, unless you slip up with the last of the three components, as you will have to do all three again. It would be better if each locked in place when you got it to a goal, so you only had to restart with the current component, not all of them.

Environmental puzzles feel much more fluid in the overall episode progression.

In the second episode, Blood of the Cybermen, there are less of the mini-games but a few more environmental puzzles. One of which will see you playing as Amy, being chased around a table by a lumbering CyberSlave in a locked room.
As you run around, you will notice some wiring hanging from the ceiling. Interacting with this wiring will cause it to hang even lower. After that you can have the CyberSlave chase you some more till he is beneath it and turn the lights on, electrocuting it.
Personally I preferred these challenges in Blood of the Cybermen, they just felt more fluid in terms of the overall episode progression. That's not to say the mini-games were not enjoyable in the second episode either (they even added a new type of mini-game to the mix), I just think the more action-based puzzles were an improvement for the storytelling.

Typical

The apocalypse happens and your car breaks down?! I mean come on, what are the chances?

Up until now I have tried to be deliberately vague about the story for each episode. That is because I would rather not spoil it too much for anyone who has yet to play them.
What I will say though is that the stories for the two episodes are very believable in terms of the Doctor Who universe. I could easily imagine either of these being shown as a normal TV episode, even as far as the fact that each took me around 45minutes to play.
The reason the story probably feels so right is just how involved the team at the BBC have been with the games development. The characters are voiced by their on-screen counterparts, and the shows writers had a part in the games story.
The only downside to this close relationship between the TV and Game teams is some of the voiceovers themselves. They are well written but suffer from the fact that Matt Smith & Karen Gillan, while good actors, are not voiceover artists. Some of the dialogue just seems slightly 'off', for want of a better word. The two characters don't bounce off each other as well as they do on the show.
To be fair this is only a slight niggle and something that I'm sure will improve if they end up doing more of these in the future.

For the UK readers, these episodes are free, simply head to the BBC website to download them now!

Overall I really would recommend these games to anyone that watches Doctor Who. They have something for your casual watchers of the show as much as for the hardcore fanatics, like myself. However, if you're not a fan of Doctor Who, while the stories are strong, they do rely on you knowing at least a little of the show, so you won't enjoy them as much

What makes it better for our UK readers is that the episodes are free, simply head to the BBC website and download them. For the rest of the world, there will be a yet undisclosed 'Small Fee' for each episode.

Title: King Arthur

Format: PC

King Arthur

By Jonny Clapham

Now this is proper Arthurian legend, none of that 'Oh he was a Roman Legionnaire' guff, just pure fantasy. Granted the game takes a couple of liberties with what is generally regarded as the proper legend, but it all helps to build a rich and interesting game world.
King Arthur is a mix of massive RTS and turn-based empire expansion. The obvious comparisons to the Total War series are as inevitable as they are favourable, but developers Neocore Games have done better than 'Total War in a fantasy setting', bringing some new ideas to the (round) table that should make bigger developers sit up and pay attention.

The single-player campaign is divided into chapters, each chapter boasting different tasks to be performed. Your campaign is controlled from the Grand Map, where progression is turn-based as you control Arthur's destiny, choosing which factions to join and which to fight while completing text-based side quests.
These text-based side quests are not as dull as the name suggests.

The use of Christianity vs Paganism is a very interesting feature

Each one has branching pathways that allow you to choose how to complete it. Of course, as is de rigueur nowadays, the moral choices you make during each quest affect the rest of the game. Enough thought has been put into each one that it really makes you think long and hard about the path you should ultimately take. It is much better to stay on one path once you start down it, rewarding you with better skills and units. So it pays not to go veering off in opposite directions just for a big payoff that won't necessarily help you in the long run.

On the grand map you control the growth of economy, research, law creation..just about everything. While this mode has been streamlined it's certainly not oversimplified.
Each area is divided into provinces that feature towns, castles and other areas, each needing to be controlled in order to take over a province. This mode is turn-based and each turn represents a season of the year. It pays to build up as much as you can before winter comes around, as during this turn armies are unable to move and the taxes role into the coffers.
The use of Christianity vs. Paganism is a very interesting feature. The player can choose between the two and how they use them. Each comes with it's own advantages and disadvantages and the system is one of the two things that measure player morality, the other being the type of ruler you are - tyrannical or just.

During the battles the RPG gameplay also comes to the fore, levelling-up Arthur, your units and other heroes' active and passive attributes. These then improve your chances on the battlefield, though they do serve some purpose on the campaign map as well.
The RTS portion is probably the most frustrating part of the whole package, and the fact that it's still damn good shows you what a high quality product Neocore games have produced. It's just the difficulty curve is completely merciless to the point that the computer was coming fairly close to being thrown out the window. Even on easy it's not hard to find yourself backed into a corner, and Arthur's death, or losing too much of your army, means game over.

Unfortunately, as the game progresses and the difficulty level rises to frustrating heights, it becomes apparent that the game is unbalanced in places. For example, some units are too powerful and unfairly difficult to beat, especially early on. To their credit, Neocore have been fixing the few problems

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like this with patches, which shows just how much a labour of love this game has been for these guys.
But detractions aside, there are some really interesting gameplay elements within these battles. For instance, it pays not to just go charging in, encouraging you to get your army positioned in key areas of terrain, or keep them away from areas where their skills would be hampered. There is also what the game calls 'victory locations'. While the A.I is smart enough to make an attempt to seize them before you, it does have the tendency to wander off, leaving the area ripe for the taking. They are useful to obtain and improve the morale of your troops, which plays a big part in battle. While most battles are fought during daylight, special well thought out hero abilities can be used to change the battlefield, such as causing a downpour that can hamper the vision of archers.

The art design, just like the game itself, is familiar yet has enough individual personality to make it's own mark on you, and the graphics are of a high quality even when zoomed in on the action. The visuals on the campaign map are just as good, employing a fine use of colour and a nice effect that shows the seasons changing.
The score is suitably epic and the voice cast do a good job, though some sounds during battle are inaudible until you zoom in, which can lead to a feeling of detachment from proceedings.

Barring a few minimal flaws, this game is a pleasant surprise and a strong contender for Total War's crown. King Arthur is ideal for those who like their grand strategy games with a whole heap of fantasy and some fresh new ideas of it's own.

Flags

Everyone likes a nice flag... we can't help thinking that these are a little excessive though.

The game is a pleasant surprise and a strong contender for Total War's crown.

Want to be the next Don?

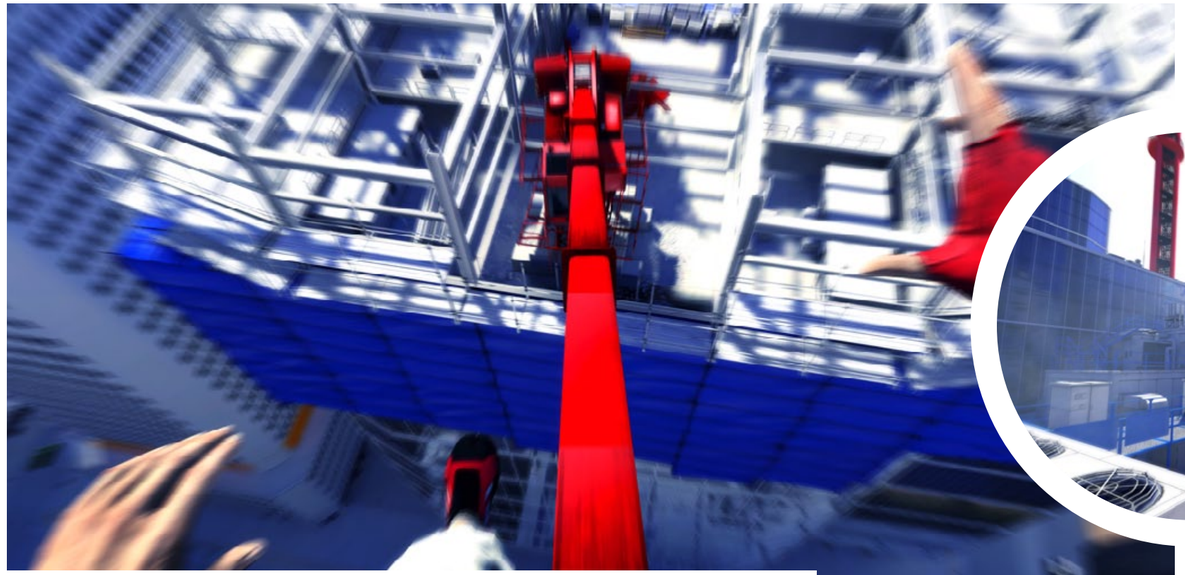
omerta 3

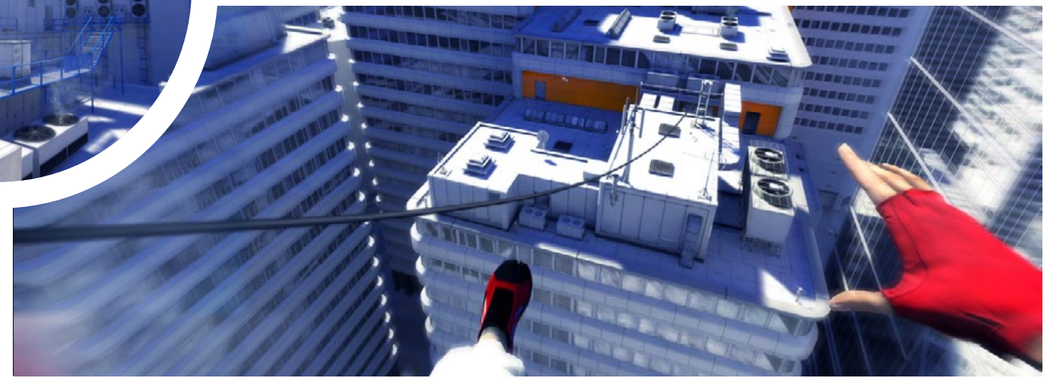
Or just another goon?

omerta3.com

Title: Mirrors Edge Soundtrack

Format: PC, X360, PS3





Mirrors Edge Soundtrack

By Alec-Ross Bower

D.I.C.E's alternative FPS, Mirror's Edge, is extremely underrated. Though the Japanese anime inspired plot and dystopian setting are highly unoriginal, its vibrant design and innovative gameplay make it a required experience for open-minded gamers. For games like Mirror Edge, everything is about style; the characters, the colour scheme, and of course, the music. Making his debut in game scoring is Swedish electronic music artist Marcus Bigersson, best known by his stage name Solar Fields. With six stylistic albums under his belt, Solar Fields was a wise choice by E.A. His music is ambient, organic, atmospheric, and deep – perfect for the game in question.

The album opens with Lisa Miskovsky's "Still Alive", the game's theme song that spawned its own album of remixes, and after hearing this song and its instrumental version it is easy to see why; the music is delicately soft and fresh, making the listener very light-headed, and Miskovsky's voice is angelic and filled with emotions many singers can't convey.

The music is delicately soft and fresh, making the listener very light-headed...

After these two tracks we're introduced to Solar Fields with the composition "Introduction". Instantly the music from "Still Alive" returns, but this time Bigersson has his fingers on the direction and his opening track will take you places. The music is dreamlike: a soft voice soothes the auditory senses while the synth rhythmically plays throughout, and in the background bubbly drums keep everything in time. It's a really poignant track and a great introduction.

Next up is "Edge and Flight" and straight away you'll recognise Solar Fields style, but you'll also acknowledge his ability to add variety. This track is no soothing ambient instrumental, but rather an electronic piece that perfectly captures Edge's constant need to flee from the authorities. The percussion gets more vigorous as the track reaches its finale and the synth effects play in dramatic keys. However, one must admire Solar Fields' talent to keep things from going too crazy and out of control.

From here to the end the tracks tend to follow a similar trend. They get darker with the plot and more dramatic during the chase sequences. However, each track has its own extraordinary individuality, and they'll manage to keep you entertained – even those with a seven minute length.

The track "Ropeburn" is another fine example of Solar Fields talent. This track starts out with a soothing ambient synth, with an intermittent keyboard bouncing in and out. All of a sudden the soothing noises stops and the music becomes a drunken beat, with deep effects sliding in and out – this track is most definitely a shady one, and it reaches impressive heights of drama before coming up for breath and slowly building back up.

Solar Fields' compositions add a great deal to Mirror's Edge's unique style and identity. The soothing music suits Edge's character and her awesome free-running abilities, while the dramatic and tense music complements the chase sequences brilliantly. Rumours state that Mirror's Edge is due a sequel, and we hope that Solar Fields returns to the rooftops for another run.

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Title: MGS3 Soundtrack

Format: PS2

By Alec-Ross Bower

MGS3 Soundtrack

The Metal Gear Solid games have always had great music; you only have to look at our past soundtrack reviews of Peace Walker and Guns of the Patriots to see how much of an impact the music from those game had - and still has - on us and gamers across the world. Many would say that MGS's music was adored after Harry Gregson-Williams rearranged the Main Theme for Sons of Liberty, while others would say the music from the original Metal Gear Solid had the initial enrapture effect. However some people – this reviewer included – believe that the music from Snake Eater was the first Metal Gear Solid soundtrack that really hooked videogame music acolytes.

With the combined efforts of Metal Gear Solid regulars Norihiko Hibino, founder of GEM Impact, and Harry-Gregson Williams, the original soundtrack for Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater spawns over two discs of musical enjoyment. The album starts with the obvious Bond-inspired theme song, Snake Eater. Sang by Cynthia Harrell, Snake Eater is a brilliant homage to the early Bond films, the spy-flicks being an obvious influence on the game's plot, setting, and Naked Snake's character. Though the lyrics are a little ridiculous at times (one thinks of the line: "Some day you'll feed on a tree frog") the song has an instant effect that will sustain the game's prominent place in videogame history.

The dramatic string melody that we've all grown to know and love sounds phenomenal...

The second track we hear has been an all-time favourite of this reviewer for many years. "Metal Gear Solid", the game's main theme, originally composed by the elusive musician Tappy, has been superbly rearranged by Harry Gregson-Williams. Starting with high-pitched synths surrounded by electronic noise and bird sounds, this track unleashes it's fury within the first few moments. The dramatic string melody that we've all grown to know and love sounds phenomenal – it's the part you must turn up the full volume for. It's hard to say what it is, but that particular melody does something to the listener, igniting emotions you won't know you have. After a few minutes of a soft ambient section – clearly arranged to convey the game's stealth elements – the music builds back up again and releases a barrage of jungle-drums that are later electronically treated. Throw in a wicked bass sample and you've got one hell of a techno session playing. Then all of a sudden the music stops. Next thing you know a clear flamenco guitar begins to play the other Metal Gear Solid melody, the one everybody considers as Metal Gear Solid's true theme – it is breathtaking.

It may seem stupid using most of the word count for this review on one track, but it's such an impressive spectacle of music it would be very difficult to cut down. Other poignant and memorable tracks are the two "Sidecar" tracks; the dramatic music that plays during Snake and Eva's motorcycle escape. Throw in "Debriefing", "Last Showdown", and "Life's End" – the latter being Hibino's best track – and you've got one hell of a playlist. The soundtrack also features Starsailor's "Way to Fall", the game's brilliantly apt credit track, a song every Metal Gear fan should know the words too.

This isn't the longest soundtrack we've ever reviewed, however, after coming to the end of this review we were left feeling there was more to be said, perhaps we'll look into Naked Snake's life-changing mission in more depth at a later date. In the meantime, get your hands on this soundtrack!

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Life at Strawdog Studios

By Simon Morris

There are a few questions that I can usually expect to be asked whenever I tell someone about my job in the games industry.
1.How did/do you get a job like that?
2.Can you get me any free games?
3.How DO you make that stuff move about on the TV?

I love the first question and I find I'm being asked it more and more - by students looking for work experience, by younger gamers who've been inspired by the games on their iPod touch, or by others just looking for a way into the industry.

My journey into the technical side of games started back in 1980, when I discovered the Sinclair ZX81 in my school, and it totally captured my imagination. I typed in all the programs in the user manual and was enthralled by the results produced on the screen. From there I graduated to a BBC Micro, and later a 32-bit Archimedes. Machines like these really were the games consoles of the time, and although we played a ton of games on them, we also started to figure out how these games were programmed and, crucially, started to figure out how to make our own.

We spent entire weekends painstakingly typing in source code from magazines...

We absorbed user manuals like sponges and we spent entire weekends painstakingly typing in source code from magazines. We examined and reverse engineered other people's game code. We slowly learned how to build games, but of course our first attempts were clumsy - dodgy graphics, garish colours, bad sound. Over time though, our games got better and more refined as we learned from our mistakes and found better solutions.

Fast forward 30 years and it's obvious just how much the games industry has grown - the games consoles now run 1000x faster than my trusty old BBC and with 16000x more memory! (Unfortunately, the same doesn't apply to me!) However, the thing is that although the technology is more complex, the principles of practical learning haven't changed at all – in fact there are programming skills and techniques I learned when I was 16 that I still regularly use today, I've just refined and adapted them over the years to suit the ever changing technology we face.

So, my favourite answer to the favourite question is always the same. Find out where your particular passion with games development lies and hone your skills. To the youngsters who like games – make up your own game and draw it (anything goes)! If you like art, create something with Photoshop or Sketchup. Or if it's programming that you fancy, set yourself up with XNA or an iPhone and make something happen on screen. It might take a few attempts to get right, it might not look great at first, but you WILL get better!

And the reason I always say this, is because as an employer, I believe that demonstrable work speaks volumes about the capabilities of an individual. Combined with passion and talent, I really think it can be as useful as formal qualifications or experience.

So, what are you waiting for? Get to it!!

Oh, and btw, the second answer is no. The third answer is "magic"!

Simon Morris is the Technical Director at Strawdog Studios. On any given day, he's usually figuring out ways to make game code run faster and on more platforms.

Strawdog Studios will be releasing their very own arcade game "Space Ark" on Xbox Live Arcade in June 2010 – look out for it, and become a fan at www.facebook.com/spaceark

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Launching a Game Studio

By Deborah Fike

There are people who follow, and then there are people who lead. In the games industry, legends have been born among those who have chosen to strike their own path. These are the pioneers of new business and innovation, the ones who had an "idea in their head," and through thick skins and thin pocketbooks, managed to launch their careers.

Billy Garretsen is one such entrepreneur. President and Founder of Perfect Dork Studios, his team is determined to become a successful game studio. With several iPhone, PC, and Mac games under their belt, Perfect Dork has already found publishing success. Billy shares his insights on what it's like to "do your own thing."

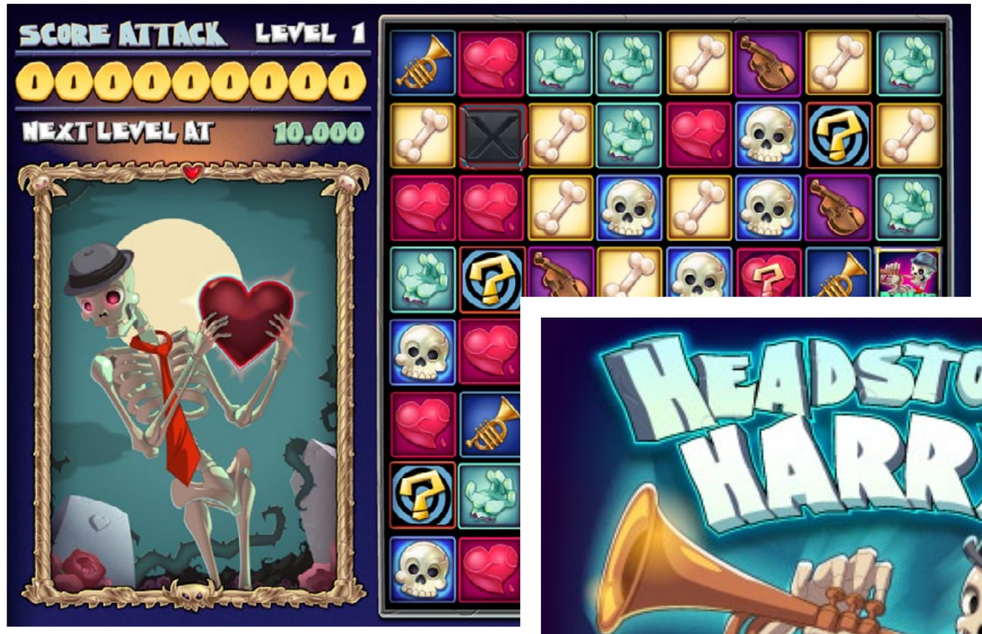
Deborah: Why did you start your own studio?
Billy: Games have had a strong presence in my life since I was really young . Around the same time I discovered games, I also discovered my ability to draw and be really creative on paper. Eventually those two passions of mine merged, and I knew that I really wanted to create my own games and get my own visions out in the community.

Deborah: What skills are necessary to launch your own studio?
Billy: Organization and focus are key to getting things off the ground early on. Anybody can file the paperwork to start a company, but you need well-defined direction. I started Perfect Dork Studios because of a very specific project, and within four months, we had our first fully realized game prototype created.

Organisation and focus are key to getting things off the ground.

Deborah: What do you wish someone would have told you before launching a studio?
Billy: I have heard from many successful indie studios that the key was to start with small, focused efforts instead of huge or overly ambitious games. If I would have followed that advice, I think my team would have 2 or 3 more games released by now that could be funding our current development.

Deborah: Got any advice for people thinking of starting their own studio?
Billy: I think anyone can start a game studio as long as they have a lot of drive and passion for it. Of course it takes talent in art, sound and programming to make the actual game. But to see your game through to the end, you will need a lot of persistence to get you through the slow and frustrating times. It's the nature of creativity and collaboration.



Deborah's Bio

Deborah Fike is a game writer for InstantAction.com, a website that delivers quality hardcore 3D games direct to web browsers. She has an MBA from the University of Oregon and worked as a Teaching Fellow for the university's Career Services Department. She has been involved in the hiring and recruiting of many members of the Torque Game Engine development team.

By Deborah Fike

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By Rob Miles

Title: Breaking Into The Industry
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092

Writing Games with C# and XNA

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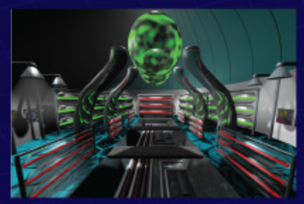

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Computer gaming requires some of the most sophisticated technology, design techniques and development applications found in the computing and creative industries.

Using state of the art software in dedicated laboratories, you will learn the technical grounding needed for programming interactive environments along with the design principles for modelling and animation.

From the very start, game production is at the heart of our teaching, culminating in a final year project which will not only focus your career aims, but provide you with a portfolio for potential employers.

This course will encourage you to express your creative concepts as well as providing you will all the skills necessary to make these a working reality.

BSc (Hons) Computer Game Development (Chelmsford)

This course is for those who wish to design and build exciting and interactive games as an independent producer.

Discover the delights of modelling, the amusement of animation, the wonder of sound, the power of scripting and the versatility of programming to convert your ideas into complete, marketable games for static or mobile devices, single players or networked groups.

No prior experience is necessary, but a fertile imagination and logical mind are essential.

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This course is for people who wish to follow careers in the rapidly developing internet and digital content industries.

The course explores the principles and practice of all aspects of media production for the internet, specialising in visual and audio media. Students are encouraged, and helped, to use a wide range of commercial software and hardware tools to create a portfolio of a range of digital content and internet based applications.

This is an intellectually exciting course which will develop both your technical skills and your creative talents and offer you the chance to specialise in those aspects of media and\or internet technology which especially interest you.

BSc (Hons) Multimedia, Animation and the Web (Chelmsford)

For those excited by graphics used in modern computer games (or even retro games), then join like-minded students on this well-established course.

Learn how to work with sound, take stunning still images, make emotional video, model the world as you would like it to be and animate anything and everything.

Imagine a world which is a disc on the back of four elephants on the back of a giant turtle. Actually, someone has already done that... can you come up with something even more fantastic? There could be money in it!

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Freedom Force vs. The 3rd Reich

Time travel is a hot topic this month in our GOG section, and this game is certainly one to go back into the past for.

Freedom Force was a superhero real-time tactical RPG, developed by Irrational Games and released in 2002. But in 2005, this band of awesome superheroes returned to overthrow Nazi Germany and its allies. The plot begins with some sort of time lapse that causes many changes in history, one of which means victory of World War II goes to the Axis. As you can imagine this doesn't go down well with Freedom Force, who instantly go back in time to correct the error and defeat the evil Blitzkrieg.

Freedom Force is a huge collection of original heroes, some of them being instant favourites and others not. The gameplay is pretty standard for an RTS-RPG, but its comic-book aesthetic really adds to the overall feel of the game. The music and the voice-acting are also pretty extraordinary, making the game a really enjoyable experience.

There's a great deal of in-jokes from the first game, so if you haven't played that one you may feel like a third-wheel, but the countless references to other superheroes provide the game with some memorable and hilarious moments.

Freedom Force vs. The 3rd Reich is one of the most inaccurate depictions of World War II, and that makes it a must-play for every gamer and historian alive – kick ass!

12/13

The Journeyman Project: Buried in Time

Marty McFly eat your hear out, because while you were away The Journeyman came out to play. Developed by Presto Studios, The Journeyman Project: Buried in Time is an FPS adventure game that focuses primarily on time travel.

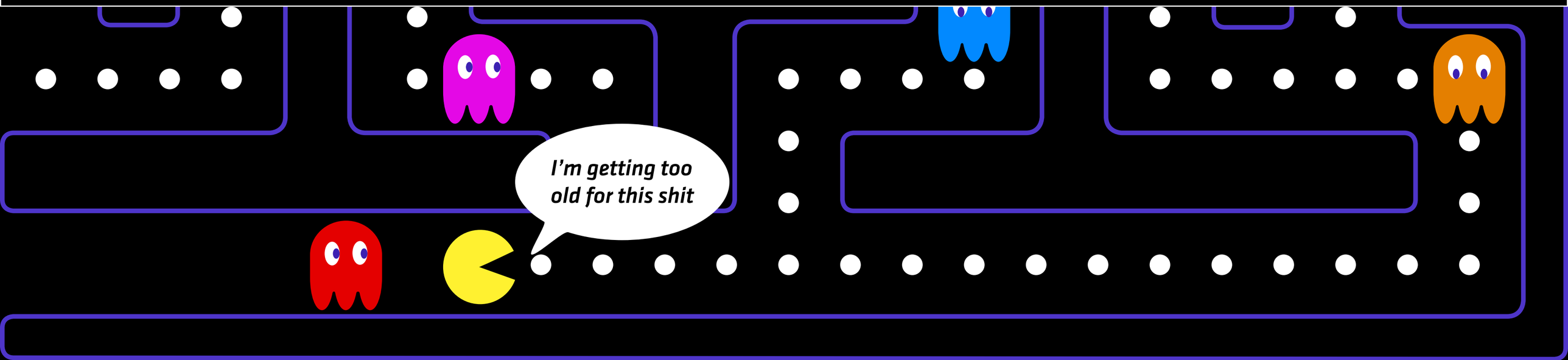
The story goes as follows: six months after the events of the first game, where Earth's original timeline was ruined causing the human race to lose out on an opportunity to join an advanced alien race's peace treaty, Agent 5, named in this game as Gage Blackwood, is visited by himself from ten years in the future.
Someone in the future has framed the future Blackwood for tampering with historical artefacts, and it is up to the past Blackwood to find the evidence to clear his name. We don't want to spoil the story by going into too much detail, plus it's one of those time travel stories that really messes with you head.

It's a great game, but the HUD has a fundamental flaw. Agent 5 is wearing some sort of time travelling suit complete with a helmet; this helmet has a very small visor, so small that the players view is extremely limited.

Released in 1992, the original Journeyman Project was one of the first PC games to use high quality rendered graphics, and the same goes for the sequel.

If you're curious about alternate theories about time travel and you like your FPS adventure games like Myst, then we highly recommend The Journeyman Project: Buried in Time.

11/13



SteelSeries Siberia V2

By Gow

A gaming headset only needs a few key ingredients to take it from good to "OMFG I can hear my ballsack slapping as I teabag this n00b!".
Right off the bat, it has to be comfortable enough to let you lose yourself in the game. Secondly, it needs to offer decent enough sound quality for you to hear the enemy breathing in the next room. Finally, and less importantly, they have to look good enough so you don't feel like a tool with two tin cans strapped to your ears.
SteelSeries offer a huge array of headsets for gamers, none quite so popular as the Siberia line. Back with a refined design, the Siberia V2 tackles all three key aspects listed above to bring you a great sounding, massively comfortable headset.
2/3 isn't bad.

A few Issues back we looked at the Sennheiser PC350 headset and, to paraphrase, we said they were bloody comfortable. It's a hard act to follow, especially with such a dominant name in the industry as Sennheiser.
The Siberia V2's not only beat the Sennheiser's for comfort, they beat every headset we've ever had the pleasure of testing. More comfortable than a cold pillow on a warm night, more comfortable than Germany's win over England, even more comfortable than resting on the ample bosom of Keely Hazel... Granted we wouldn't trade the headset for an opportunity to rest on Keely Hazels breasts, but they are so unbelievably comfortable that we'd have to think about it for a second. The key to this comfort is the suspended head band – ok, it messes up your hair, but it gently rests the headset on your noggin without gripping your head, and there's so little pressure on your ears you soon forget that you're wearing them. It's a good job they come with such a long cable, as it is easy to forget you're attached to your PC as you wander off to the fridge for snacks.

So that's comfort taken care of, but how do they perform audibly? Very well, that's how! The headset produces a great warm bassy tone in music playback, which plays a great part in explosion-filled games. Despite this, the set still picks out the highs and has a pretty good mid-range. It's hard to pick a fault with the sound, there is no real weak point, and whilst huge audiophiles could probably point out where the sound is lacking, it would purely be nitpicking.
When tested with music, the V2's produced a great crisp sound with a good soundscape. Tracks jump out at you with new sounds emerging, which are hard to discern through a mediocre set.

Finally, looks; the headset is certainly unique, with a solid headband connecting the two cups and a soft headband suspended below. SteelSeries even offer an iPhone adapter, so you could wear these in public. While you may be able to achieve this in some major cities, trying this on Hull public transport did nothing but garnish looks of confusion, even more so when we pulled out the retractable mic to answer a call. Maybe it was just that the cups covered our ears so completely that it's hard to judge how loudly we should be talking..

This is a brilliant headset with a well thought out design. The inline remote offers mic mute and volume control and with a range of available adapters they can be used on both your iPhone and Xbox Live for when you want to "pwn" some 15 year-old n00bs on Halo.

For the price of £65 it's hard to find many headsets that compare, the design caters for almost every head size and shape and they offer great sound. It's hard to find a fault with a set that can only be described as being as comfortable as a nice plump breast, but I suppose that analogy only works for guys, guys who have met and talked to real women... That's our demographic out the window.

Razer Imperator

By Gow

Razer have such a huge following in the gaming world, offering class-leading gizmos to everyone from the bedroom gamer to hardcore competitive finger-bashers. Their latest gaming mouse, the Imperator, offers a 5600DPI sensor, two thumb buttons, on-the-fly sensitivity adjustment, gold connectors and, thanks to the Teflon coated base, slides around more than a greasy weasel on a bobsled run.

Razer mice have a fondness in gamers' hearts, their distinctive looks and top-notch performance offer a familiarity across the range. Over the years the design has been refined but never really changed all that much – it's easy to spot one of their mice from a mile off, thanks to their trademark logo and glowing scroll wheel. Unfortunately the industry has matured, and with mice now reaching upwards of the £70 mark, there's plenty of competition. Can the Imperator keep up?

The Imperator is a step in the right direction for Razer, the mouse feeling more like a high-end product than previous offerings. The grip is much more ergonomic, similar to that of the Logitech g500. Razer claim that the Imperator has been designed to work for both the claw grip and the palm grip, although it feels much more natural adopting the palm grip. The shape of the mouse keeps your palm firmly planted, which can lead to sweaty palms, and the glossy plastic down the sides don't help at all. The ace up the Imperator's sleeve is it's adjustable thumb buttons; on the base you'll find a handy little slider that moves the thumb buttons towards you (if you have tiny hands) or away from you (for those with hands like Shrek). It's a gimmick, but it's a useful gimmick, and if you often find thumb buttons fiddly and awkward to access then this is the mouse for you.

With a price of around £45 it's by no means a cheap mouse, and the feature list is pretty limited. It's a simple, well made mouse, but the 5600DPI is nothing more than a marketing exercise, as at that kind of sensitivity games are uncontrollable. Unfortunately, it's competition are a little more developed and offer slightly more. Adjustable weight is a huge benefit to mice, despite what many people say, and it can be hard to go back to a light-weight mouse after playing with a weighted mouse for a few years. The Razer can be twitchy and a little too responsive thanks to it's light weight and ultra sensitive sensor, throw in the countless energy drinks to get through the night and you'll start to think your game character has developed Parkinson's.

The Imperator can be easily customised through its drivers, offering 5 sensitivity levels for on the fly adjustments, macros, and you can even customise the glowing light with a vast array of two settings; on or off.

While this review may sound a little damning, the Razer is at the cheaper end of the gamer-mouse spectrum and is a massive improvement from the usual Razer design. Mice are completely subjective and what's right for one person isn't necessarily right for another. If you're used to a lightweight mouse and prefer to palm your mouse across the desk, it's a ruddy good mouse with some great features.

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Landit Bandit

The Bearded Ladies have all but invented a new genre with their PSN casual-helicopter-sim Landit Bandit, but that doesn't mean it can't be exploited for some drinking game madness.
This is based on each player playing one mission at a time. It's best played on some of the later missions due to the increased time, and a fully unlocked account is recommended so you can use the last two rules.

Rules

Watch out for that..... - If your chopper breaks while trying to land, take a drink. If your chopper breaks during flight as a result of crashing into something, take 2 drinks.

This Flight has been Delayed - If time expires before mission completion, take a drink. If you finish the mission before time expires, everybody else takes a drink

Excess Baggage Sir? - Make a note of the cogs and energy you pick up. If you finish the mission on time, everybody else should take that amount of drinks.

First, Business or Coach Class - If you earn a Bronze, Silver or Gold medal, everybody else takes 1, 2 or 3 drinks respectively.

This In Flight Meal Sucks - If you kill/stun a shark, everybody else takes a drink. If you get destroyed by a shark, you take 2 drinks.

As cool as a Polar Bears Posing pouch - Everybody takes a go at the Penguin ski-slope jump challenge, furthest distance wins. Everybody but the winner takes a drink.

Space Ark

For the last week now, Craig (TurkeySaladBoy) & Gow have been raving about Space Ark, demanding it make an appearance at the next games night. So for that reason I have based one of this month's drinking game on it. While the game has a multiplayer mode, this game is based on the single player because it makes it easier to follow. Simply pass the controller around between levels, and remember the players forfeits so they can drink them after the stage.

Rules

Double Up - Every time the multiplier increases by 2, everyone else in the room takes a drink

Pavement Pizza - Every time you let your character hit the floor, you take a drink

Powerplay - Every time you catch a power-up, everyone else in the room takes a drink

Powerless - Every time you miss a power-up, you take a drink

Perfection - If you finish the stage with a perfect bonus, everybody else has to finish their drinks

Wipeout - If you lose all of your lives, you have to finish your drink

Drinking Level:
EXTREME
...To the max

Drinking Level:
HEAVY

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Competitions

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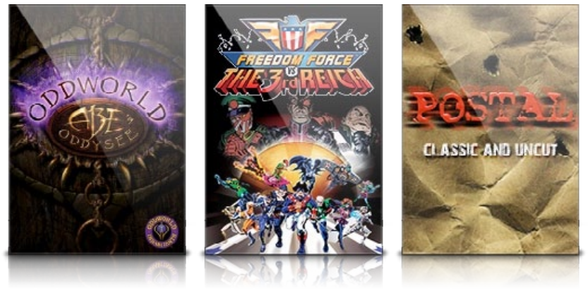
GOG Game Giveaway

Retro Gaming Goodness with 6 games of your choice from GOG.com! We're continuing the celebration of retro-goodness this month, with another awesome competition in collaboration with GOG.com!

We've joined forces with GOG to give 10 games away! 1 lucky reader will receive codes to download 6 games of their choice from the entire store.

That's hours of retro gaming goodness!



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Plants Vs Zombies

So, long story short, Gow just got himself a swanky new iPhone 4. Strangely enough, it's coincided with a spike in his Facebook activity and a drop in work productivity..
The phone can pretty much do everything besides wipe your ass – and there's even rumors an app for that is in development.

Ever since he got it, all we've heard is Plants vs. Zombies this, Plants vs. Zombies that. Apparently, "Our readers NEED to know how great this is!".
Our very own DrunkenGamer did review it for you in issue 24, but that's not enough.

So, Gow is digging into his own pockets (read: T1 bank account. Cheeky mare..) to once again give you the chance to experience the little piece of iPhone wonderment. We're giving away 5 copies, just to shut him up.

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Mystery Box

The time has come for the T1 office to have a bit of a clear o right – we're actually doing a spot of cleaning! We mange to a lot of games and, well, random shit, over the course of a y many of the items finding their way into a draw or our 'organized' filing cabinet of wonderment.

Not one to simply throw things away, we've decided to give it all to a couple of you lucky readers! We won't even tell you what you'll win (we don't know ourselves yet)..that's the mystery part! Ooo, it's like reading an issue of Lost.

This competition comes with a warning though: most of the really good games get claimed by the T1 office workers. And we say "random shit", we really mean it.
You have been warned. No send-backsies!

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*Note: To enter competitions in the PDF, please include your name and address (some prizes are UK only)

Splitfish FragFX Pro

So many people wanted last issue's Splitfish Dual SFX Frag Pro that we decided to give another away! We know, we spoil you sometimes..

Splitfish are kings of the controllers for many hardcore gamers out there, and their latest offering – the Splitfish Dual SFX Frag Pro – is as good as it gets when it comes to console-based FPS action.

Usable on both the PC and the PS3, the Dual SFX Frag Pro brings all the best of the critically acclaimed FRAGFXv2 mouse gaming design in a dual wireless combo.
The wireless controller gives you that same PC style gameplay on the PS3 and doubles as an optimized mouse for PS Home and Browser navigation.
This baby is faster, more accurate and easier to use than a standard PS3 controller when it comes to FPS action.

Click to Enter ▼

The Ed would like to thank...

- Gloriously named **The Bearded Ladies,** who hooked us up with the weird and wonderful Landit Bandit! Get your hands on that one, folks.
- **Microsoft's ever helpful Dominic**, for sending over a last minute code for our Crackdown 2 review. A super-powered, building leap of a thanks to you!
- The understandably upset (world cup woes) Dutch creator of **Biker Battles**, **Stefan Gaasbeek**, who guided us through his new game's alpha stage.
- The ever chipper **Chris Stevens of Koch Media**, getting in touch right away with preview code for **Lost Horizon** – one of new favourite point-and-clickers!
- **Bastion's cool as ice Christina Erskine**, who sorts us out with all things **gPoato,** including this months look at **Castle of Heroes expansion Tower of Babel**. It's a top, free-to-play browser game that's well worth looking at.
- The fine folk at **GameHorizon** – conference extraordinaries and fantastic hosts. The recent **GH2010** was awesome! Hope the feature reflects that.
- **Bastion once again, this time Luke Geoghegan**, who sorted us out with all things **Naughty Bear.** Shame it failed to impress, but you can't argue with the marketing these guys did! Had me all excited as well...
- **Lunch PR** (who we've never actually done lunch with..what a travesty), for serving up a code to play **Blacklight: Tango Down** and it's endless amount of weapon customisations.
- Daily slugger **Simon Callaghan**, blasting us back into the past with new **RTS King Arthur.** This one is going to have the Total War creators shaking in their boots..
- Everybody who contributed to another fantastic **Breaking Into the Industry** feature, including **InstantAction's Deborah Fike** and **Strawdog Studio's Simon Morris**.
- The guys over at **Razer** and **SteelSeries**, who both provided some top bits of tech wizardy for us to review.
- Ever efficient and always hard-working **Scott Malthouse**, this month tackling **Darkness Within 2: Dark Lineage 2, Biker Battles and Lost Horizon**. Don't know how we'd manage without you, man.
- And while we're talking about essential contributors, look no further than **Alec-Ross Bower**. The chap who handles the **13-1 countdown's** each month (including this issues epic look at **badass boss battles**), as well as the **Retro gaming** section and **music reviews**. Much love to you both!
- Got to give love to T1's own **TurkeySaladBoy** this month as well, who has ran himself ragged partying for free at **E3** in L.A, then having to sit through another free bar at **Gamehorizon**..OK, so he did a hell of a lot more than that (you knows we appreciate it!) Check out his top write-ups of both events!
- **Kieran McSherry** and his wily analytical ways, this month applying them to a look at **Modern Warfare 2 vs. Battlefield: Bad Company 2**. Don't know which is for you? Check out the article now!
- Relatively new but growingly welcome volunteer **Stuart Morrison**, who tackled **Fifa Online** for us while we concerned ourselves with the real World Cup. Wish we'd just joined you online instead, mate.
- The ever tipsy **DrunkenGamer**, for not only reminding me of a certain office companion I'd completely forgotten about (whoops), but for also spending hours snapping screenshots for the **World of Warcraft "Wish You Were Here**" feature, hopping the universe in **Mario Galaxy**, beating up bosses in **Castle of Heroes** and giving us more game design insights from his own version of **Omerta**. Top effort mate.
- And of course, **Gow** and his graphical savvyness. Without him, this issue would just be a bunch of html'd text. Possibly with a nice blue background – depends how well I can remember CSS. He also managed to surface from his dark room to take on **Blacklight: Tango Down!**
- **Everybody else who helped us put this issue of the mag together. Sorry if I've forgotten to mention you directly, we really couldn't do it without you!**

-ED

Enjoy Gaming?...

Enjoy Writing?...

We are looking for a small number of volunteer writers, a graphics support person to help with layout and an assistant editor to assist with coordination of the whole project. We are potentially interested in illustrators/cartoonists with something fresh to offer the publication.

There are numerous benefits to volunteering for Thirteen1, including the awesome incentive of early access to top-games! You will also be the envy of your mates when they see your work published in a popular gaming magazine!

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Send an email with the subject "Volunteer" to general@mmo-magazine.com

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"bluegfx is all about service, Thirteen1 have given us this opportunity in providing this to those looking for a 3d software and hardware reseller with leading edge experience" says **Neil Parmar, Director & Co-Founder** of bluegfx.

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